



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Spark Impact Report 2020

■ Making a world of difference to student enterprise

Spark
University of Leeds
Business Start-up Support
at the Careers Centre



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Thank you from Spark



*Kairen Skelley -
Head of Business
Start-Up*

2019- 2020 will go down in history as one of the most challenging times for business, of that there is little doubt. The Covid 19 pandemic has left the commercial world with immense challenges, not just on a global basis but also for those whose business activities exist at a local level.

But with challenges come opportunities. And that is where true entrepreneurs shine. They see potential, they recognise diverse new markets, they innovate, they pivot, they use their contacts, and they roll their sleeves up and get on with it. True entrepreneurs always find a way!

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And that is true of the businesses we support in Spark at the University of Leeds. We have seen our young entrepreneurs thrive in these challenging and unprecedented times. Our annual impact report will highlight some of those success stories and the issues they have had to face and overcome. You will read about pre and post pandemic activities, and the impact that the Santander Universities Emergency Fund has had on our businesses. You will hear about the importance of our impressive alumni network and their vital, and much appreciated, gift donations which have kept businesses afloat and even helped some grow.

The figures you will see reflect what has happened throughout this year. Notably there is a significant reduction in the numbers of international students setting up business here due to uncertainties in visas, funding streams and the sustainability of their ventures.

Yet the figures are still impressive, with significant revenues generated, jobs created and monies leveraged from outside sources. We have seen entrepreneurs emerge from all faculties across the University and at all stages of development. We have seen an increase in digital businesses and the number of undergraduates running their own ventures. And we have seen that the city wide infrastructure and support networks have retained businesses within Leeds and Yorkshire.

The Spark business model, utilising our professional networks, our Spark alumni, our University of Leeds alumni and the blended approach of the Alumni and Development Team, the CEES, the student union and the enterprise societies, has resulted in a robust, sustainable, consistent offering which has directly assisted in maintaining a strong business ecosystem at the institution.

It has been a tough year but the strength and resilience of our young entrepreneurs always impresses and we in Spark and at the University of Leeds are committed to supporting them and their future.

Economic Impact of Incubator Businesses

2019/2020



External Funding
Leveraged:
£690,000



Revenue Generated:
£1.75 Million



71 FTE jobs
created



60 Spark businesses
using incubator



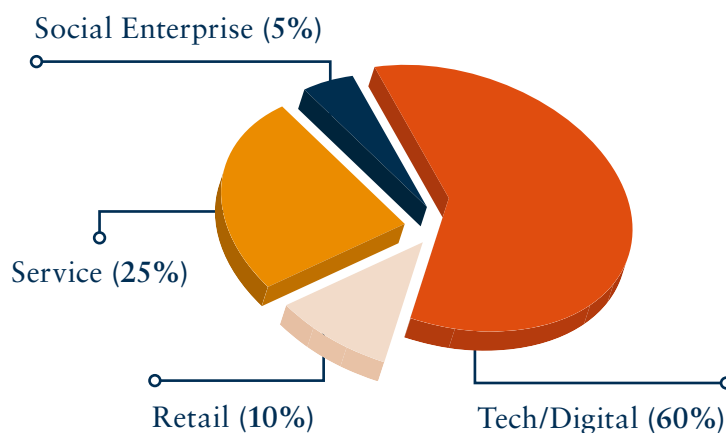
50 Business
Start-ups



20 Start-up Visa
Recipients

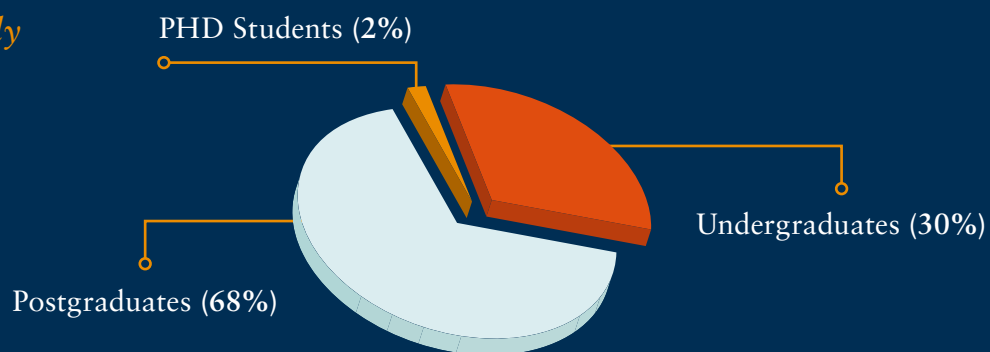
Business Sectors

>

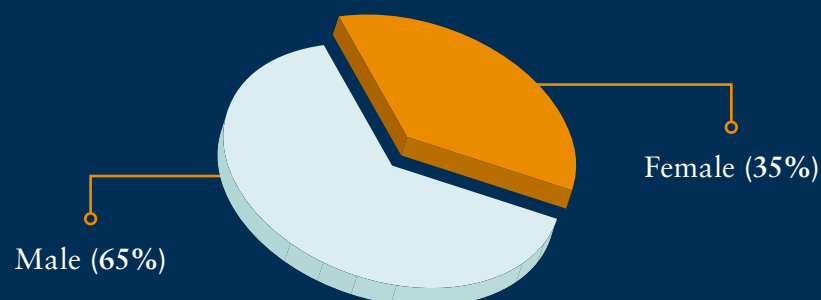


Business Ownership Breakdown - Year 6

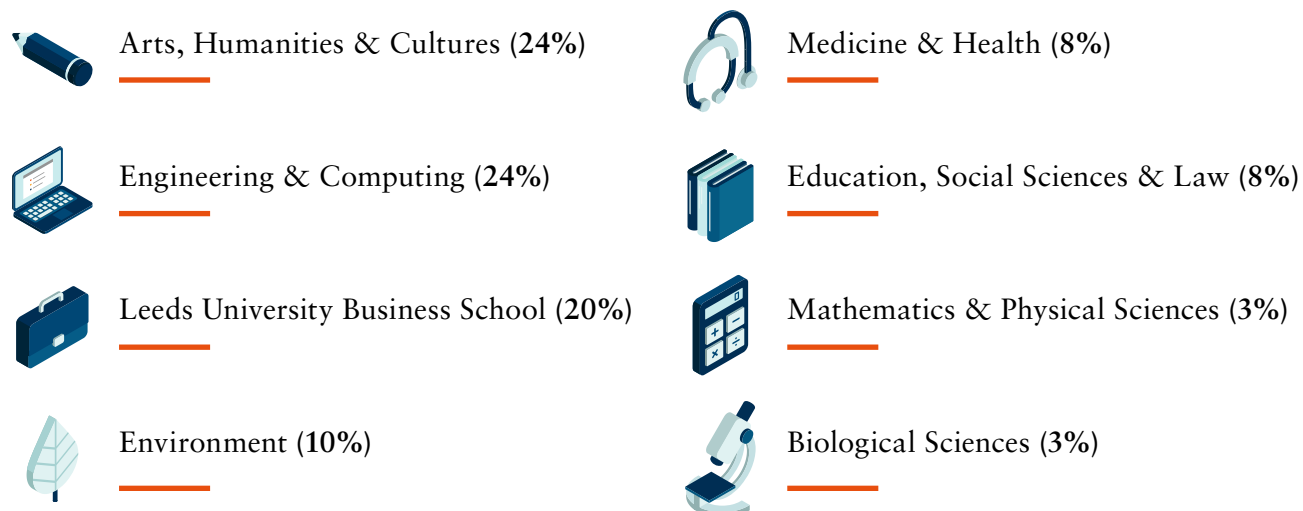
Level of Study



Gender



Faculty Breakdown



We Are Social Enterprise (WASE)

Lyndon Timings-Thompson and James McBride



After graduating with a BSc in Geological Sciences from the University of Leeds, Lyndon worked in construction project management before deciding to begin his own business venture 'We Are Social Enterprise'.



We Are Social Enterprise (WASE) was created in 2018 with a view to helping hard-to-reach individuals into employment, predominantly the construction sector. Since then the business has successfully tendered to be on the supply chain with multiple Tier 1 principal contractors and is predicting a six-figure turnover for 2020.

“

I applied for the SPARK entrepreneurial scheme in early 2020 as I believed it would offer a fantastic support network for me and my business. The incubator provides an exceptional workspace and gives me the ability to focus on my business, without the concerns associated with finding (and funding) my own workspace.

Despite only being enrolled on SPARK for a few months, the programme has already provided a fantastic support network for me and my business, with multiple networking events and introductions to experienced business advisors and mentors. I was also shortlisted for the Sir Peter Thompson Enterprise Award 2020. The SPARK entrepreneurial programme offers invaluable support for early stage businesses and I would highly recommend it to any eligible entrepreneur!

”

Reshift Ltd

Naseef Ahammed



With a passion for travel and the environment, Naseef completed a postgraduate degree in renewable energy at the University of Leeds in 2019.

Reshift Ltd is an energy management company offering innovative solutions for SMEs in the Yorkshire region. Its all-new energy auditing service brings in automation and digitalisation with in-house hardware and software solutions to collect, process and analyse data. Reshift Ltd are also currently testing a load monitoring hardware prototype and developing its integration into a dashboard for future clients.

“

Spark have been alongside me from the very inception of my entrepreneurial journey. The advice and the support from the Spark team are the driving forces behind the realisation of my dream to decarbonise energy-intensive industries.

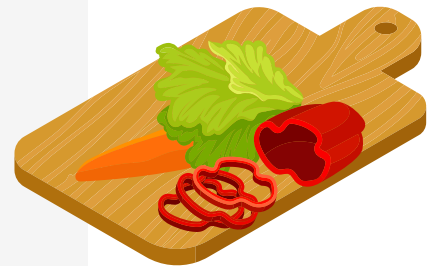
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Flavr

Nick Thorp

Do yourself a **Flavr**



Economics graduate and former enterprise scholar, Nick Thorp developed his idea for a recipe-based grocery shopping platform into a successful business, a growing team and a connection with the largest supermarket chain in the UK.

FLAVR innovatively combines the benefits of both conventional online supermarket shopping with meal kit companies, thus, providing an efficient end to end grocery shopping experience where customers benefit from an abundance of choice, flexible commitment, and the freedom to try new and exciting meals, whilst at the same time saving them hassle and money.

Flavr

flavrfood.com



“

The Spark scholarship and team has been critical to the development of this idea into a reality. Without Spark it would have remained just an idea. Access to the incubator has provided the team with a fantastic space to build and develop our business.

”

Butt & Co Ltd

Zhenyu Li



Founded by economics graduate Zhenyu Li, Butt & Co Ltd are an import and export company specialising in car care products for the car wash industry. With a strong growth before the pandemic, Butt & Co now supply the majority of the car air fresheners in London and turned over more than £600,000 during 2019.

During the current pandemic the main business of car care products have been temporarily put on hold. However, as many of their existing clients are chemical factories in the UK and were producing hand sanitizers, the business focus quickly changed, helping clients by importing hand gel lotion pumps, surgical masks and automatic soap dispensers. This adaptability has meant that the business is still continuing to grow and develop into new markets.



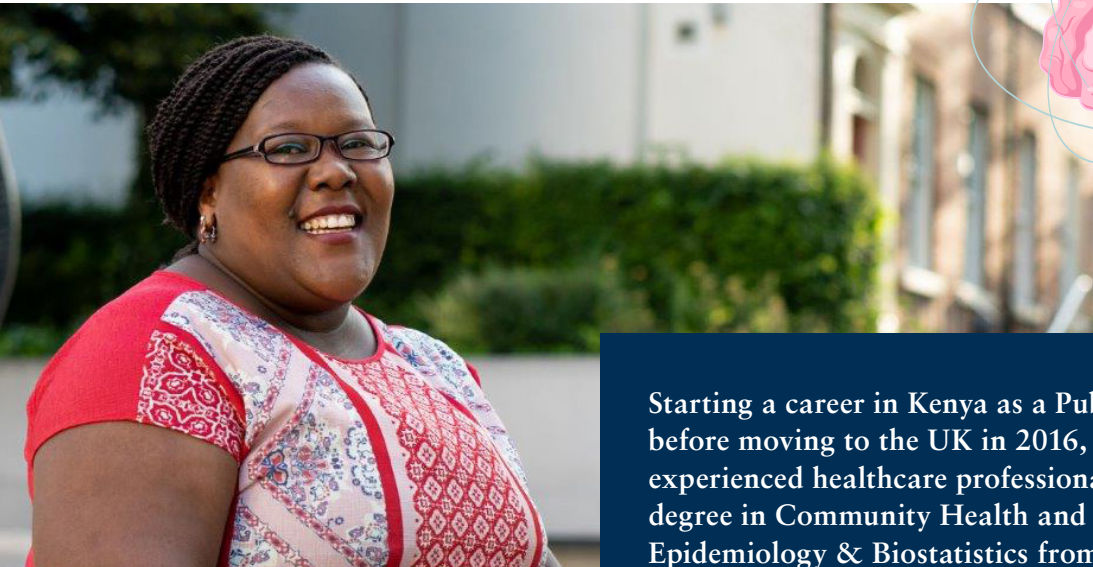
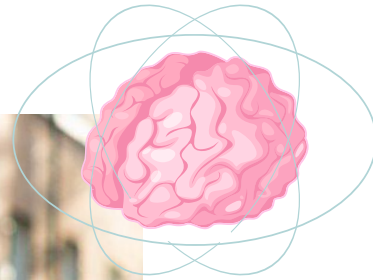
“

I appreciate the help from Spark, particularly during the pandemic. They were very helpful with this difficult situation, and I finally reached a good solution. Spark also introduced me to a lot of good networks and gave me extremely useful advice.

”

Revitalise Minds Limited

Jeniffer Makau



Starting a career in Kenya as a Public Health Officer before moving to the UK in 2016, Jeniffer is an experienced healthcare professional with a bachelor's degree in Community Health and a Masters in Epidemiology & Biostatistics from Leeds.

Revitalise Minds was inspired by Jeniffer's experiences while working in the social care industry. She conducted market research to understand how best to support people who have mental health issues through using bespoke social activities as the most effective remedies employ a social approach to treatment, management and rehabilitation.

“

Spark has played a major role in giving me a solid base to build my business from ideation, business plan development and company formation. They have given me mentorship, networking opportunities, office space, endorsement for the entrepreneur visa and a grant which was used for branding and building the company website.

”

During the current Covid 19 pandemic, Revitalise Minds has had to adapt from face-to-face service delivery to a digital platform offering their services and carrying out intensive networking and marketing.

“

Before the pandemic we were in the pre-revenue phase of the company but with the change in circumstances due to the pandemic, we are now generating revenue. It has not been easy, but the networks and business relationships created within the Spark community have proved extremely useful.

”

SeeAI

Reo Ogusu and Saile Villages



“

Starting a company is not easy, but SPARK believed in us. They made us feel that we could do it.”

SEE AI are a med-tech company developing an AI that helps reduce the workload of radiologists. They are working with NHS Scotland for the development of their technology. SeeAI was founded by two international Masters students Saile Villages and Reo Ogusu.

We approached SPARK with our idea and they have supported us ever since. They provided us with proof-of-concept funding and office space at NEXUS which gave us the head-start we needed. We were awarded 1st place in the annual [Business Plan Competition](#) organised by SPARK and we currently represent the University of Leeds in the [Santander Universities Emerging Entrepreneurs Programme](#).

SeeAI



“

The Covid-19 pandemic caused major disruptions in our business. We had to quickly adapt to the new circumstances and we found an opportunity in this challenge. We came up with the idea of using our technology to minimize the disruption for radiology students and trainees in their education. This idea was chosen by Innovate UK as one of the innovative projects to receive funding to address the needs emerging from the pandemic.

SPARK believed in us, and thanks to that, we were able to go from an idea to where we are now.

”

Madeby.Studio

Sam Taylor and Matt Wheeler



Founded in April 2019 by Matt Wheeler and Sam Taylor, madeby.studio is a creative and digital design studio based in Leeds city centre.

Sam and Matt became good friends during a final year brief for their Graphic & Communication Design degree at The University of Leeds. With joint aspirations of combining digital design practice with strong business values, madeby.studio was born.

“

With the help from the University's SPARK team, we've been able to access business mentors, funding and facilities which have given us an incredible platform to build on. SPARK has given us a great pool of contacts, from direct mentors to everyday friendships, which have been pivotal in the start-up phase of the business. We now collaborate in a range of sectors from healthcare to construction, delivering progressive digital design solutions to help businesses thrive on an international scale.

“

Starting a business is a challenge, with many unexpected twists and turns to make every day a little different. When people discuss overcoming hurdles in your first year of business, a global pandemic doesn't often get coverage. However, one year on and in the midst of Covid-19, the studio is still steadily growing, taking on new clients and seeking remote employees.



Enterprise Scholarships



An Enterprise Scholarship is an alumni supported scholarship for current students that comes with a £3,000 grant and a programme of tailored business support.

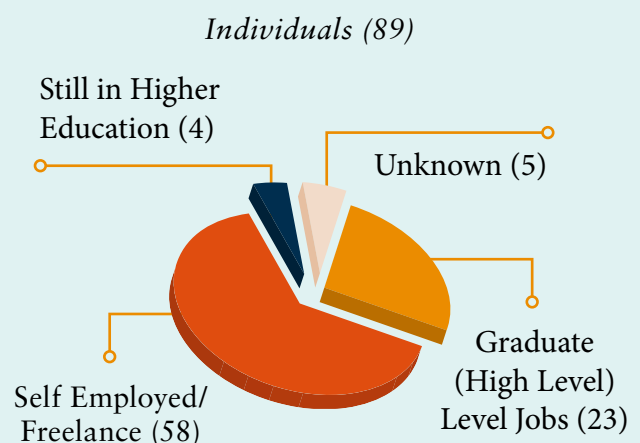
The Scholarship is unlike most other scholarships in that this is an opportunity to develop a business idea through a programme which is entirely based around the practical elements of business start-up rather than the traditional academic and sporting scholarships. Enterprise Scholars are awarded a place on an intensive business boot camp and are automatically eligible to take advantage of the on-campus Spark incubation space. Moreover, access to business advisers, accountants, lawyers and other business professionals is available to the Enterprise Scholars throughout the year.

Enterprise Scholars

2014/2020

Using data from the last 6 years, you can see from the graph opposite that the vast majority of Enterprise Scholars over the last 6 years are either:

- > *Still running their businesses (65%) or*
- > *Working in high level graduate roles (26%)*



Tips & Bricks

Alex Johnson



Current Product Design student, Alex Johnson has a passion for entrepreneurship, hoping to pursue a career in business management and strategy.

Adults are increasingly looking for exciting and innovative ways to relax and unwind, and many have turned to the classic building toy of LEGO® for this. In fact, 10% of LEGO's profit comes from adults and many also use LEGO® as a creative medium to create more than just the building sets but works of art.

Having recognised this niche market, Alex set up his blog 'Tips&Bricks' in July 2017 and since then has grown it to become the leading blog on Instagram that inspires these adult fans of LEGO®. It has been recognised by The LEGO Group themselves as an official fan media and he receives support and access to press releases for new product releases. Alex is now looking to expand the business by recruiting other contributors to help him continue to create daily engaging content for the blog as well as information handbooks to sell to his audience.

“

Having no formal business training and simply refining my business through trial and error for 2 years before university, SPARK has been an irreplaceable resource for me in terms of support and knowledge. The amazing team at SPARK has not only accelerated my blog to new heights but my future career, giving me the experience and expertise to have attained a position in the Leeds Consultancy Community, a pro-bono consultancy firm. These opportunities will allow me to stand out against other young entrepreneurs in today's competitive workplace environment.

”

Meedu

Steven Riddle



Steven has recently graduated with a Masters degree in Dental Surgery and begins working as a dentist in September 2020. But during his studies, Steven has also been developing the educational platform 'Meedu'.

Meedu is a knowledge management system aiming to improve learning outcomes in higher education through enhancing 'text-based' module specifications into a digitised, educational content sharing platform for students, enabling them to easily find the best content to learn their course. Despite Covid-19 affecting initial plans, Steven successfully ran a beta test with the University of Leeds Dental Students and collected some great results to incorporate into future developments.

Steven received a proof of concept grant, an Enterprise Scholarship and also won first prize in the Business Plan Competition in 2019, which enabled the development of the first phase of the platform.

“

Spark at every level has been invaluable and I owe every existing & future success to their support and guidance. Meedu wouldn't have been possible without the SPARK programme.

”

CurlyGalChlo

Chloe Elliot



During my third year of university, I spent some time living in Germany working as an English Language Assistant. It was something that I dreamt of doing since I was 11, but reality didn't live up to my expectations. I was determined to take on the challenge and find a way to get through the year, which is when CurlyGalChlo came into being.

CurlyGalChlo is an online platform championing Black-owned brands through social media support and creative services and with the support of a SPARK Enterprise Scholarship, it evolved to include ODYSSEY BOX UK. Having seen tremendous growth despite the impact of Covid-19, ODYSSEY BOX UK is currently the only bi-monthly subscription box services exclusively offering luxury, plant-based hair care for curly, kinky and coily hair types from Black-owned brands. Starting my entrepreneurial journey has meant that when times are hard, I find a solution through business!



Yokeru Ltd

Ashley Oldershaw



During his final year at the University of Leeds, Computer Science graduate, Ashley Oldershaw co-founded the assistive technology business Yokeru Ltd and now runs the business full time. Since then Yokeru had made several pivots to modify its business model, market segment, technology and features to make it what it is today.

Yokeru create technology to help with elderly care and humanitarian projects. Using their automated phone system, a recent pilot programme with Fulham and Hammersmith council supported more than 9000 people on the government shielding list, and identified over 650 people who needed specialist help from their council during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2019, Ashley was awarded an Enterprise Scholarship and together with his co-founders attended the Spark Enterprise Boot Camp. Yokeru also received the runner up prize in the Spark Business Plan Competition.

Yokeru

“

Our main focus is creating technology to help care for vulnerable people. Spark has been the reason we've been able to get off the ground. Their support and advice has been hugely valuable, and we learnt so much during the Enterprise Scholarship Boot Camp and throughout the year.

”

Business Plan Competition

Cooper King Distillery



An adventure in Australia triggered the ambition to build a sustainable gin and whisky distillery for University of Leeds PhD graduate Dr Abbie Neilson and her fiancé Chris Jaume, winners in the Trading Category of the 2020 University Business Plan competition.

Within 18 months of returning from their trip of a lifetime, the couple – formerly a medical researcher and chartered architect - had raised £350k through crowd-funding, innovation grants and private investment, built the Cooper King Distillery near York and produced their first gin, cold-distilled with local botanicals including Yorkshire lavender and honey from their on-site beehives. Fast forward two years and the couple have a close-knit team of ten staff, are maturing their first batch of whisky and have a portfolio of 10+ sustainable spirits that have won a raft of national and international awards and accolades.



Their environmental credentials are just as impressive as their business acumen: the distillery is powered by 100% green energy, a native woodland and orchard has been planted on site to increase biodiversity, and a collaboration with the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust ensures one square metre of English woodland is planted for every bottle of their gin sold.

The annual Business Plan competition is open to students and graduates of the University and has two categories: Pre-Trading and Trading up to 24 months, with a total prize fund of £8,000 generously gifted by University alumni.

“

Abbie said:

The process of the competition itself has been enormously beneficial. Having to condense your ideas and convey your future plans succinctly and credibly is a really tough but worthwhile exercise as it helps you reflect, re-assess and reinforce your vision. Presenting our business and brand values, then facing challenging questions from the competition judging panel was a really valuable experience.

”

“

Chris added:

The £2,000 prize was a fantastic bonus. We have used it to buy a dedicated server for the distillery and a fantastic piece of software that will allow us to integrate production schedules, stock control and the sales process into one efficient system. It sounds a bit dry but it's an essential piece of kit that's putting us in a great position to scale up the business and we're really grateful to the Spark team for their support.

”



“

Kairen Skelley, Head of Business Start-Up at Spark said: Abbie and Chris are testament to there being no limit to what you can achieve with great ideas, ambition and hard work. What they've achieved in such a short space of time is astounding and we have no doubt that they'll deliver on their exciting future plans for the Cooper King brand.”

The full list of category winners in the 2020 Business Plan Competition

Trading (up to 24 months)

>

1st Prize of £2000:

Dr Abbie Neilson and Chris Jaume
Cooper King Distillery

2nd Prize of £1250:

Barnaby Greetham Birkbeck (Year 2, Geography and Business Management)
Barnaby's Brushes - stylish, sustainable toothbrushes with replaceable bamboo heads

3rd Prize of £750:

Alex Johnson (Year 1, Product Design)
Tips and Bricks - blog teaching and inspiring people to build custom LEGO models

Pre Trading

>

1st Prize of £2000:

Saile Villegas and Reo Ogusu
SeeAI Ltd- artificial intelligence software for rapid and efficient detection of bone fracture in X-rays.

2nd Prize of £1250:

Ashley Oldershaw (Year 3, Computer Science with Artificial Intelligence), Monty Alexander (Year 4, Mechanical Engineering) and Hector Alexander
Yokeru Ltd - Home care sensor analytics providing insights into behaviour changes of vulnerable and elderly people

3rd Prize of £750:

Jack Miller (Year 1 Economics and Management), Daniel Jackson (Year 1, Environment and Business), Edward Silverstein (Year 1, Banking & Finance) and Jack Glazer (Year 1, Economics and Finance)
USH Transport - a campus based electric bike scheme.

Adam Beaumont Awards 2020



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The University of Leeds Beaumont Award recognises research projects in the areas of Biological, Environmental and Physical Sciences, Engineering, Medicine and Health undertaken by undergraduate students from any discipline. This might be a Final Year Project, a research project, or related to an internship pursued at the University. Recipients of the Adam Beaumont Awards were last year invited to the Spark September boot camp covering all aspects of starting a business in order to help them commercialise their research projects.



Entrepreneurs Exchange

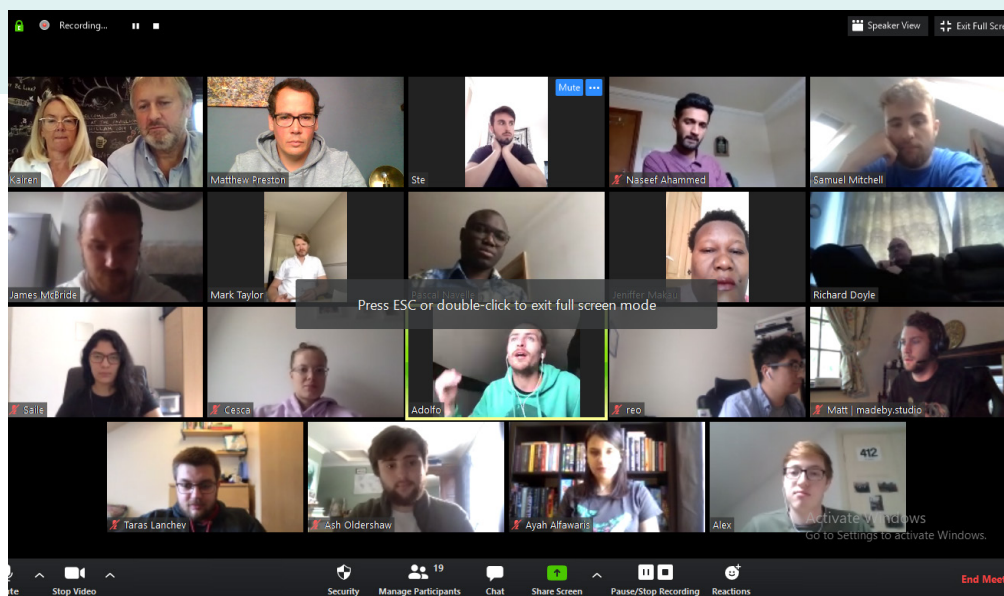


Every two months, Spark organises Entrepreneurs Exchange, an event which brings together our young entrepreneurs to a round table discussion about their issues, problems, good news stories and successes.

It is a great forum to hear from other business owners and share best practice and commercial opportunities. Guest speakers from the alumni donor community and Spark alumni businesses bring an added element of learning about the reality of the commercial world and the relaxed feel of the meeting means that everyone is welcome and included.



Entrepreneurs Exchange is a fabulous opportunity for alumni entrepreneurs to give back to the University and truly engage with the business leaders of the future. This event has remained popular despite the lockdown.



Santander Universities Covid 19 Emergency Fund



In such unprecedented times, emergency funds can be a much needed and necessary lifeline for a new start up business. Santander Universities recognised this and provided a pot of funding to the Santander universities to go directly to the business founders who might otherwise have struggled to keep afloat or may never have realised their dreams. The Santander Universities Covid 19 Emergency Fund has been distributed to a number of businesses, some of whom are highlighted below:



FAMILIES AFTER MURDER

Families After Murder Ltd

Sarah Lloyd

F.A.M is a Social Enterprise aimed at reducing knife crime through a variety of ways including, presentations, workshops, educational platforms, community settings and professional services. The current pandemic threw up some real challenges in delivering these services and introduced a lack of certainty as to whether or not they could survive. As a fledgling business with very little resources, the fund enabled Sarah to set up her own home office and continue the business.



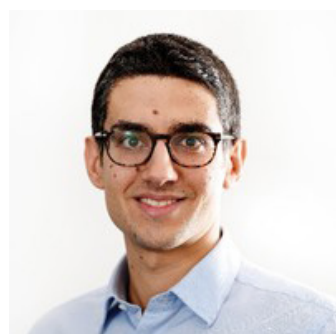
Bloomin' Buds

Katie Mahon

Previous Enterprise Scholar and Theatre and Performance Graduate, Katie Mahon runs Bloomin' Buds Theatre Company aiming to provide access to opportunity, to the arts and raise aspirations for young people from lower and working class backgrounds.



When COVID first hit it was a very distressing time, I was pregnant and running my own company. I had to act quickly in order to sustain my company and think about how we were going to navigate through this crisis. This funding was the first funding that I received. It meant I was able to spend the time planning for how we were going to get through it without having an immediate worry about myself financially. This funding gave me the time to plan for the short-term future more effectively.



Taggernauta

Nicolo Zanellato



The support from Spark and the fund provided by Santander have been extremely beneficial for developing my idea further”.

Nicollo created Taggernauta, an automated audit and best practices tool for web marketers using Google Tag Manager and the Google Marketing Suite.



The idea came before the pandemic, but I took the opportunity while on furlough from one of the biggest employers in Leeds, to develop it. This software will make it easier to manage a company's data governance, making it simpler and more cost efficient than allocating internal resources or hiring external consultants”.



bndl

Will Shonn & Jack Bergmann

bndl is a monthly subscription delivery service supplying cleaning and household essentials for student houses and accommodation across the UK. Alleviating the task of splitting monthly costs, bndl provides students with all the products they need to keep a house clean, whilst splitting the cost of these products fairly and conveniently with other housemates.



Covid-19 has been a challenging time for many and although it had disrupted our University Sandwich Placements, without the virus our business would not be here today”.

Will, bndl Co-Founder & CEO, was working in the Netherlands and as a result of the pandemic, he was unable to continue working abroad and had to return to the UK. Consequently, the founders found themselves speaking a lot more once they were both back in London and eventually created the concept that is now bndl. The company service thrives to ease student lives and Covid-19 has presented a perfect opportunity to address a problem which has existed in student accommodation for many years.



Receiving the grant from Santander has allowed us to do so many things and we are extremely grateful that it let us test our product before entering the market, something that was absolutely necessary for us to do before launching this business.”



Thank you from the Spark team
for reading our impact report.
We look forward to another
enterprising year ahead!

Email us at: spark@leeds.ac.uk

Visit our [website](#)