



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



Spark Impact Report 2021

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. The COVID-19 pandemic has left the commercial world with immense challenges, not just on a global basis but also for our local businesses.”



It has been a year in which we have reviewed, reset, recovered and rebuilt, and with a mindset of wellbeing, enterprise and winning, consistently growing and developing, the road to recovery will be swift and certainly exciting.

In the last 18 months we have heard comments from our Spark entrepreneurs such as “terrible, ruinous, deflating, confidence knocking, hard to survive, disaster”. But these were very quickly replaced by “resilient, opportunities, determination, civic duty, making a difference, confident about the future, survival”, and these are the high level skills and attributes that we instill in our entrepreneurial students and graduates here in Spark. Our Impact Report this year shows just how resilient our young business people are. They have not just simply gone away but thrived in the toughest of business environments. We have seen a significant increase in the number of students who want to make a societal and environmental difference and the Business Plan Competition entries highlighted the desire to make global change for good.

From installing bee hives on the rooftops of commercial buildings to interactive online immersive theatre experiences. From sustainability consultancies and environmentally friendly transport systems to innovative renewable energy companies. We have seen technological advances, from global security defence software to radiological med tech innovations. From online help for people with mental and physical challenges to

new gaming development. The inspiration from the University of Leeds students and graduates is palpable and infectious. And Leeds is a great city in which to do business. The entrepreneurial ecosystem at the University, in the city and across the region makes this stand out as an exemplar of how things should be done. The feeling of support and collaboration is second to none and Spark are proud to be an integral part of that.

Our alumni donors have continued to support Spark throughout and we are extremely grateful for that. Their financial donations help to future-proof our new businesses, they drive revenue growth and help build winning teams and networks. This unique participation only improves diversity and inclusion, helps outreach, facilities and activities and creates a sustainable model allowing us to be consistent with the Spark offering.

Our incubator facility in Nexus will re-open with a new sense of hope and ambition. Our new online workshop platform, provided by Spark alumni business Synap, provides a free 24/7, 365 days a year resource for anyone thinking of starting or are running an early stage venture. And with the blended approach to enterprise between the Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurial Studies, LUU and the Spark alumni donors, we have managed to create a clear pathway for ambitious young business people from initial idea to start up and growth.

Here's to a bright new future.

Kairen Skelley

Head of Business Start-Up
University of Leeds

Economic Impact of Spark Businesses

2020/2021



External funding leveraged:

£494,000



Revenue generated:

£2,390,000



FTE Jobs Created:

77



45 Spark businesses
using incubator



55 Business
Start-ups



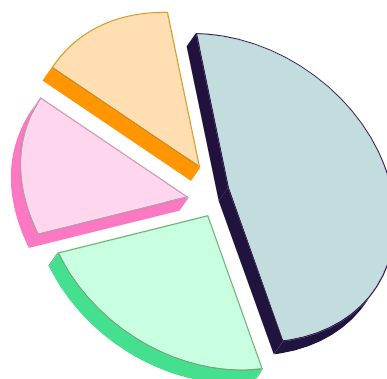
20 Start-up
Visa Recipients

Businesses Sectors

Social Enterprise
14%

Service
15%

Retail
23%

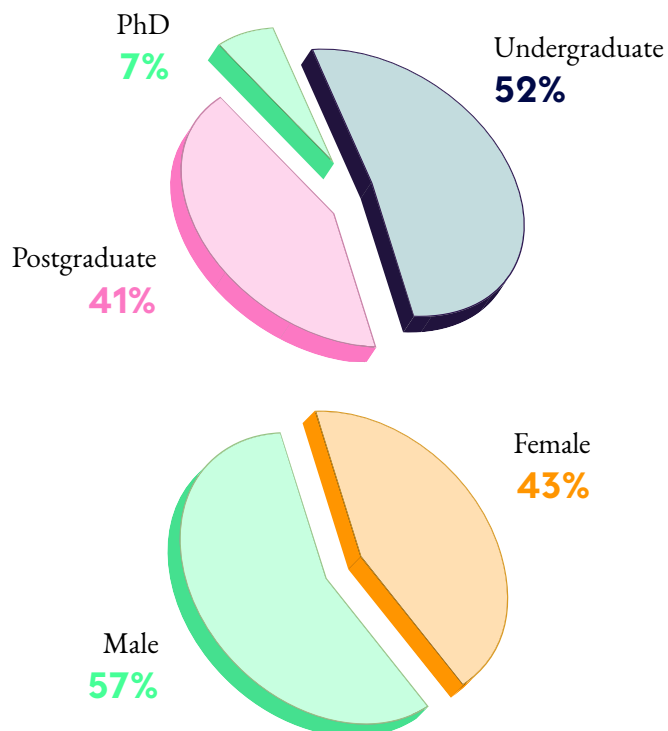


Technology & Digital
48%

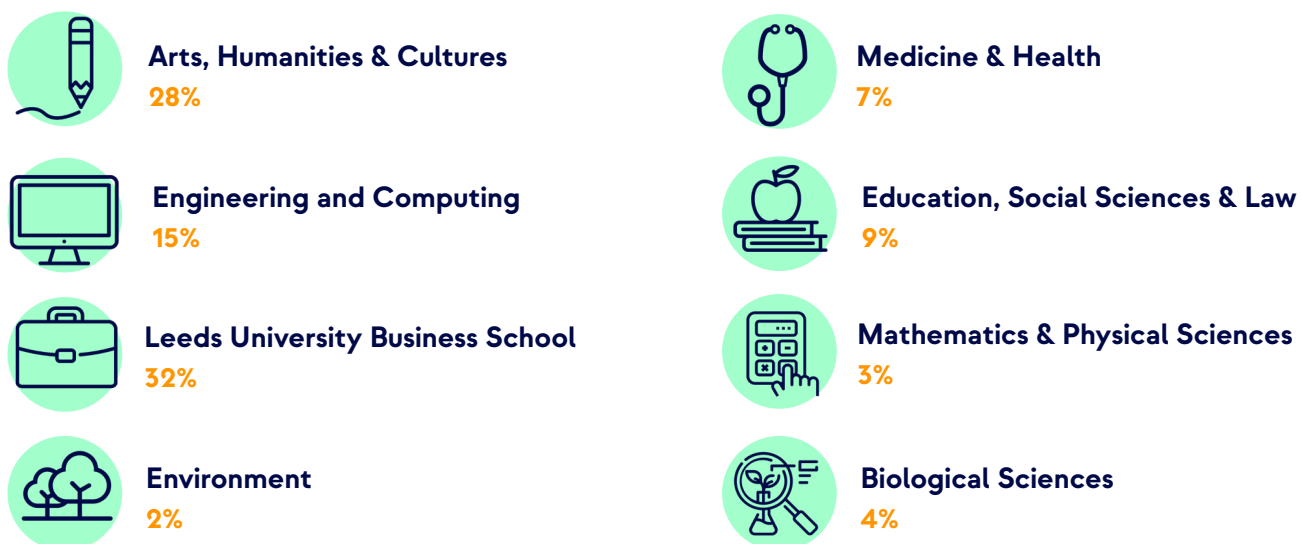
Business Ownership Breakdown

2020/2021

Level of Study



Faculty Breakdown



Moss Nook Honey

Harry Simpson



moss_nook_honey

nookmoss

What started out as a hobby when he was 15, is turning into a thriving – and lucrative – beekeeping business for first year Economics student Harry Simpson, thanks to Spark's support.

When his first hive's harvest produced over 30kg of honey which sold almost immediately, Harry realised the potential for Moss Nook Honey. He also started building and selling hives, installing them for clients all over the country and sharing his beekeeping knowledge to advise people how to look after their honey bees.

"I had a waiting list for hives but couldn't afford to buy in the components to fulfil the orders. I hadn't realised all the support available from Spark until I spotted something about the Business Plan Competition online. I thought there was no harm in entering, and was really excited to win a cash prize of £1250! The timing was perfect as it's allowed me to buy all sort of tools and equipment I really needed as well as fulfil the orders on my waiting list." Having successfully reared many more queen bees, Harry can expand his own colonies to 18 hives, housed back home in Lancashire. Now with over 5000 followers on Instagram (@Moss_Nook_Honey), demand has rocketed, with Harry supplying Michelin-starred and other high-end restaurants as well as shops in local villages. A nearby mead brewery is keen to buy hundreds

of kilograms of his locally-produced honey and his next planned honey harvest is already sold through pre-orders.

Harry has applied for a license which will allow him to import additional equipment and hive components to lower his costs, increase his profits and expand into new areas. "I'm now also investigating the growing demand for pollination contracts, where farmers rent out hives for several weeks to help pollinate their crops. Spark's support has had a huge impact on my business and opened up so many opportunities," he said.



USH Transport


Jack Miller, Edward Silverstein, Daniel Jackson and Jack Glazer



(From Left to Right) Jack Miller, Jack Glazer, Daniel Jackson and Edward Silverstein



 ushtransport.co.uk

 [ushtransport](https://www.instagram.com/ushtransport)

 [USHTransport](https://www.facebook.com/USHTransport)

Jack Miller, an Economics and Management student at Leeds, together with fellow business students Jack Glazer, Edward Silverstein and Daniel Jackson, are gearing up for a pilot scheme that will offer electric bikes to get around the campus and commute locally.

Collaborating with the University, USH Mobility's core services will be exclusive to Leeds students and staff, who will be able to sign up to the scheme and rent an e-bike for various periods of time as a sustainable, convenient and accessible form of transport.

The students turned to the University's business start-up team, Spark to improve their enterprise background, and were awarded second place in the prestigious 2021 Spark Business Plan Competition, presenting a confident and articulate vision for their existing business and its future development.

Jack Miller said, "It's great to have your ideas recognised by business experts, and with the prize money we're excited to take USH to the next level. Spark has such a vibrant support network, and their advisory team have been a brilliant sounding board. They've really helped us broaden our horizons and explore further opportunities. We look forward to seeing what the programme has to offer over the coming months."

Ahead of the trial period at the University in late 2021, Jack and his co-founders are working closely with a tech entrepreneur to learn how to adapt different characteristics of the electric bike to improve its eco functionality.


Yoga for AS

Jamie Boder & Geoff Lindsay



 yogaforas.com

 [yogaforas](https://www.instagram.com/yogaforas)

 [YogaforAS](https://www.facebook.com/YogaforAS)



It was a chance meeting, in an Axial Spondylarthritis (AS) support group, that Jamie Boder met his business partner Geoff Lindsay. Together, they founded Yoga for AS, a global online platform for the safe delivery of yoga sessions for those suffering with the autoimmune condition AS, a form of inflammatory arthritis.

James is in his third year, studying Cultural and Media Studies, and was introduced to Spark during his role as president of the University's Entrepreneurial Society. He was thrilled they offered support for early-stage businesses and applied for the Spark Enterprise Scholarship in early 2020, believing it would offer a fantastic support network for himself and the future of his business.

"I was diagnosed with AS when I was 18 and Geoff and I understand what this condition is like, but we also know that yoga can be a transformative tool for recovering a better quality of life. The yoga business was already online, but we wanted to develop our digital offering and reach a wider community. The Spark team has supported this ambition through an excellent hub of information, finance planning and workshops."

James identified that understanding GDPR, disclaimers and interpreting data was the crucial next step to their business success. Through Spark's connections, James received expert legal advice and access to a network of peers and mentors who offered precious insights, motivation and opportunities to collaborate.



"Yoga for AS started as a lightbulb moment when I met Geoff, and we're determined to make the business a success, but more importantly, make it impactful. Spark has helped me recognise ways in which the business can be more financially viable, whilst still offering an affordable service. I've also been using the new online portal to connect with, and be inspired by, other like-minded entrepreneurs. It's such an inspiring place to share thoughts and ideas." The business has recently had conversations with physiotherapists and rheumatologists who have been advising Yoga for AS on future developments.

Sports Science Insider

Will Shaw and Emily Dingley



 sportsscienceinsider.com

 [spscinsider](https://www.instagram.com/spscinsider)

 [SPSCInsider](https://twitter.com/SPSCInsider)



University alumni Will Shaw and Emily Dingley are taking a fresh approach to building a user-friendly, evidence-based sport science resource, open to athletes, students and researchers.

The Sport and Exercise Science graduates co-founded Sport Science Insider, a digital media company that brings together high quality, reliable and up-to-date information via one easy-to-access platform.

“Sport Science Insider is an online space, where we’ve pooled together lots of resources to help explain the principles of sport science,” explains Will. “There’s no restricted content, so the features are available to anyone and everyone with an interest in managing and improving their subject knowledge and its real-life application.”

“I currently divide my time between building the new business with Emily, teaching at the University of Leeds and finishing my PhD in Biological Sciences, so to have Spark on board from the start offering support and assistance has been very reassuring.” Spark has provided the pair with funding, practical advice, workshops and mentoring, so they’ve been able to turn a workable idea into a successful online business over the last twelve months.

“The Spark team have given us so much encouragement throughout the year,” continues Emily. “We were thrilled to be granted Proof of Concept funding, which enabled us to pay for writers to produce a collection of articles which we regularly publish on the site. This frees me to both grow this business and continue my work as a strength and conditioning coach.”

“Spark has also arranged workspace in the Spark Business incubator on the University campus, which we can’t wait to move into. We’ll continue to benefit from networking opportunities and ongoing business mentoring, especially with advice around financial planning, accounting and the legalities around expanding our online business.”



Hitcher Encounters

Arathi Suresh, Ellie Cansdale, Grace Wilkinson and Hetty Bater



(From Left to Right) Hetty Bater, Grace Wilkinson, Ellie Cansdale & Arathi Suresh

Stages being closed during lockdown has been no barrier to Leeds-based theatre company, Hitcher Encounters, formed by four University Theatre and Performance students with a shared passion for producing interactive, immersive shows.

Arathi Suresh, Ellie Cansdale, Grace Wilkinson and Hetty Bater have embraced a new age of digital performance, creating a production which can be enjoyed from the comfort of our living rooms.

Arathi explained: “Digital theatre has come a long way during the pandemic and our new project, We’re All Strangers Here, is a mini-series of audio experiences. The production is based on real stories, each told from a different perspective, and we provide a platform for our audience to connect with each other.” The four friends acknowledge the role Spark has played in support of their business and developing their confidence: “Spark is the most incredible resource for student entrepreneurs,” says Arathi.

“The Scholarship has helped us build vital skills and the team have introduced us to some amazing business mentors and advisors. Through the Enterprise scheme, we have also signed up to the incubator space and we can’t wait to be granted access to such a creative work space once all lockdown restrictions have been lifted.”

Receiving a financial boost for their business after winning third prize in the 2021 Business Plan Competition, Arathi and her co-artistic directors plan to use the funding to cover registration fees for a number of fringe festivals, including Edinburgh and Brighton.

“Spark has encouraged us to explore all opportunities and through this new era of digital storytelling, we’re so excited to be collaborating with CyberTank, a virtual home for emerging artists that is based in New York. To showcase our work on an international virtual stage is such a wonderful opportunity for us. I’m really excited and confident about the future of our business and I’m grateful to have a huge network of people at Spark to turn to when we need it.”



hitcher_enc

hitcher_enc


hitcherencounters.com

Crease Preventers

Ben Clark



 creasepreventer.co.uk

 [thecreasepreventers](https://www.instagram.com/thecreasepreventers)



Spotting a potential opportunity, Business Management student Ben Clark set up his own business, Crease Preventers in 2019, selling a device to keep footwear looking brand new.

Spark supported Ben with an introduction into business, plus access to specialist training, mentoring and networking. Ben also received some seed funding from Spark, which he used to buy commercial stock and support the marketing strategy of his business.

One year on and Crease Preventers has sold over 75,000 pairs across 30 different countries and continues to be one of Amazon's best selling products within its category, earning the prestigious 'Amazon's Choice' badge in 2020.

Ben credits Spark's role in launching his business. "I was able to take advantage of the on-campus incubation space and work in an environment where everyone wanted me to succeed," he said. "Spark's advice and expertise were instrumental in helping me develop and drive my business idea, and bring my products to market."

Graduating from the University's Business School in 2020, Ben went on to win first prize in the trading category of the University's 2021 Business Plan Competition. Organised by Spark, the prestigious competition is open to both students and graduates, and the additional funding helped Ben develop his company website and explore other marketing tools.

Ben added, "I cannot thank the Spark team enough for their generosity and for all the opportunities they created for me. From the very start, it was a very special experience to be introduced to a community of like minded and enthusiastic individuals, and it's brilliant to know that there's a level of support which will always be available to me."



KeepUs Close

Lia Smith



 [keepus.close](https://www.instagram.com/keepus.close)

 [etsy.com/uk/shop/KeepUsClose](https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/KeepUsClose)



International Business student, Lia Smith developed her passion for creating handmade and personalised jewellery into a successful online business, and is already expanding into other product ranges.

KeepUs Close started as a hobby during lockdown, making custom jewellery for herself and her friends, but with the [Enterprise Scholarship](#) funding, Lia has been able to quickly set up an Etsy shop, increase her stock levels and work with graphic designers on the creation of a new website.

“Spark supported my early business idea and helped me develop my business plan, to get KeepUs Close off the ground. Their advisory support is excellent and they’ve given me access to a professional and relevant network, funding and their excellent online library of business support videos which are extremely beneficial and inspirational - they motivate me to become even more successful!” While Etsy has been the perfect platform to launch her business, Lia hopes that through her own ecommerce website, she will grow and strengthen her brand and boost sales. With the assistance of the

Spark team, choosing the right pricing strategy and organising her finance plans will be the next steps to help her meet her business objectives, now and in the future.



Airedyne Intelligence

Moin Shah




AIREDYNE
INTELLIGENCE

Moin Shah is a fourth-year business management student, and has used his degree studies to gain the practical experience needed to start his own venture, Airedyne Intelligence.

The company proposes improvements and solutions to the way organisations manage and use data within the defence technology industry.

“I’m really interested and excited by data, especially within a research and innovation environment. I look for ways I can develop my technical and business knowledge and my course has given me the opportunity to implement, test and evaluate my understanding. Airedyne Intelligence is the result of everything I’ve learnt to date, but I needed advice to develop a broader business strategy. So, I turned to the Spark team to help me progress this and bring my ideas to life.”

The University’s business start-up programme, Spark, offers students the opportunity to be advised through all stages of business planning. Although Moin had a commercial infrastructure in place, the team helped him focus on enhancing his business model and consider ways to achieve his enterprise ambitions.

“Spark runs development workshops, provides online tools, runs business competitions and identifies funding opportunities to help students develop their skills, networks and confidence. I’ve benefited massively from these resources.”

Moin has been keen to attend some virtual events offered through Spark’s new online portal, which provides opportunities to meet with other students and graduate entrepreneurs, as well as hear from guest speakers covering a wide range of interesting and helpful topics for small businesses.

“The chance to network and meet other business leaders, academics, students and industry experts has been one of the most valuable aspects of the Spark programme. We were introduced to excellent mentors, and they’ve helped me recognise and assess my goals with their personalised support and guidance.”

“When I graduate in May this year, I plan to take advantage of the alumni community and networks created through Spark, to continue the exchange of ideas and knowledge surrounding the sectors I specialise in. I’m also keen to stay informed about key opportunities and upcoming activities.”

Mladenov Brothers Ltd

Slavyan & Hrisyan Mladenov



 thinkmb.co.uk

Founded in August 2020 by Computer Science students Hrisyan and Slavyan Mladenov, Mladenov Brothers Ltd is a web design and development agency, Spark Business Incubator based in Nexus.

Working alongside like-minded entrepreneurs, businesses and innovators, the brothers hope the co-working environment will unlock new opportunities that will accelerate the growth of their business.

“E-commerce start-ups have had a busy year, as millions of people have turned away from traditional retail and bought products and services online,” explained Slavyan. “We used this shift as a springboard to launch Mladenov Brothers Ltd, and Spark offers us the facilities and expertise to deliver real commercial impact to our clients and help them develop digitally.”

Hrisyan and Slavyan originally turned to Spark for business support and to develop their business plan. The team also introduced them to experienced professionals and mentors for advice on financial planning and legislation.

“Spark offers invaluable support for early-stage businesses, and giving us an exceptional workspace allows us to focus on our business, learn from peers and make new connections,” continued Slavyan. “Nexus is kitted out with all the essentials we need such as superfast wi-fi, break out areas for networking, private meeting rooms and even a cafe. I don’t think we’ll ever want to leave!”

Turncoat Games

Sam Murphy and Corin Elliott



The characters from Turncoat Games first design 'Shaft' by Sam Murphy

Friends since school days in Bristol, second year Mathematics students Corin Elliott and Sam Murphy are now using their complementary skills to capitalise on the huge demand for tabletop games with their partnership, Turncoat Games.


"People who like board games buy a lot of board games," says Corin. "And there's an enormous global community of dedicated YouTube channels, reviewers and bloggers reporting on new, independently published games that are bold and inventive."

Turncoat Games' first design combines Corin's rules with Sam's artistic talent. Shaft is set in a sci-fi world where players scramble to escape the jaws of a chasing alien. But uniquely, players make their moves simultaneously, and so anticipating others' escape strategies and choosing moves to bluff, betray and sabotage everyone else is the key to winning.

Initial play testing with enthusiastic friends has already led to pre-orders and Corin and Sam are currently planning production of Shaft for early 2022, supported by a crowdfunding campaign and boosted by a special £500 award from Business Plan Competition judge, Nick Howard of Limehouse.

"Spark's online resources have been invaluable, particularly the advice about intellectual property and the advantages of different business structures," says Sam.

"We're very excited to launch Shaft and already have several more concepts in the pipeline. Long-term, we aim to build a brand strong enough to license other independent designers' games on a royalties basis."

 turncoatgames




Creative Appointment: Ingrid Bale


With a wealth of creative experience and drive, Ingrid primarily works with our students and graduates, helping them to find ways in which they can commercialise their own creative talents.

Kath and Rosa

Katherine Crawford and Rosa Rist



 depop.com/kathandrosa

 [kathandrosa](https://www.instagram.com/kathandrosa)

Inspired third year undergraduates Rosa Rist and Katherine Crawford started their enterprise with minimum investment and from the comfort of their shared student accommodation, selling preloved clothing from resale platform Depop.

Both Rosa and Katherine were existing Depop sellers, so they combined their efforts and found a way to effectively turn their hobby into income, working on their online business around their studies during lockdown. They made a solid plan, did their research, bounced ideas off each other, and took advice from those around them, including the University's dedicated start-up support team Spark.

Katherine explained "In many ways, Uni has been an excellent time to start and grow our business as we have 24/7 access to business support, workshops, training videos and funding through the University's Spark Enterprise Scheme and their online portal."

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns they had to quickly adapt their purchasing model, as they were no longer able to source clothing from charity shops and vintage markets. Using clothing suppliers and online clearance outlets to obtain their stock, they hope the Scholarship funding will finance another business change.

The £3,000 grant will help them significantly grow their Depop platform and they've already researched buying new stock,

building a company website to target new markets and purchasing a postage label printer to improve their services.

Rosa continued "When we secured the Enterprise grant, Spark helped us with our financial planning and put us in touch with an accountant who guided us through our first tax return. We've still got so much to learn, but we've already learned to adapt quickly to factors outside our control. Now is definitely the right time for us to learn new skills and improve our existing ones so that when we both graduate, and make this our full-time career, we're one step ahead. That's really been down to the Spark scholarship and team who have helped us on our business journey so far."



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. The following two case studies are those of students who have recently been awarded the Enterprise Scholarships.

Beyond Bees

William Setra



Second year undergraduate William Setra began learning what it takes to build a business through his Biotechnology (with Enterprise) degree course at Leeds, and with the support of the University's Spark team, recently set up his social enterprise.

His keen interest in bees and beekeeping led him to look into urban areas and how sustainability could be improved through the development of a beekeeping management programme. With a declining bee population, safeguarding the sustainability of bees became a personal concern.

"It started with an idea to design green roofs for pollinators and a very simple business plan. I went to Spark with my initial idea and they guided me through the basics of business planning, drafting a spending plan and refining my grant applications. It also ties in very nicely with my business module, so I'm benefitting both my degree programme and my enterprise interest!"


William attended Spark's virtual business bootcamp and received some great feedback from other scholars. This encouraged him to expand his research into how urban companies could benefit from rooftop beehives and he's now integrating this vision into his business strategy.

"Green roofs provide vegetation for water control, wildlife habitat, and better urban air quality, so there's also likely to be space for a small hive! From a couple of informal conversations with the brand Nike, I discovered that they're leaning towards the trend as they develop their corporate responsibility programmes which is exciting. I'm positive that with the backing of the £3,000 Enterprise Scholarship grant, I'm on track to produce a new website so I can officially launch with an online presence."

The long-term plan is to promote urban beekeeping further, and push the concept to larger corporate companies who have an active sustainability agenda and are looking to outsource their strategy and operations.



 beyond_beesuk

 beyondbees.co.uk



MyStudentFitness

Edward Mbanasor



Edward Mbanasor is a certified personal trainer and online coach. London-born-and-bred, he's currently a third-year medical student and founder of MyStudentFitness (MSF), an online personal training platform for busy students.


"I'm passionate about helping busy students make fitness simple, manage their time better and be more productive. During my years of studying, I struggled to find a workable balance between three key aspects of my life - productive studying, regular exercise and an exciting social life. The creation of MSF was a student-friendly solution."

A committed student, but with a true entrepreneurial spirit, Edward was looking for that extra support to take his business to the next level. The University's business start-up service, Spark, was on hand to provide him and his new venture with the expert advice, knowledge and guidance he needed to reach a wider audience.


Edward participated in the online Business Bootcamp in December 2020, where he won a competition which involved pitching in front of a panel of enterprise professors and scholars. The competition prize money, added to the £3,000 Enterprise Scholarship grant, has encouraged Edward to refine his business strategy and evaluate how his business could be developed digitally, creating a stronger finished product he could circulate to other student societies.

"Starting a business whilst studying at university has been quite straightforward and the experience has provided the best building blocks for my future as an entrepreneur. With the support of Spark, and some of the best facilities on my doorstep, I've learnt how to map out my business to make it more viable and profitable. I also hope to become an Enterprise Ambassador, to seize opportunities and get other students involved in enterprise activities outside of their degrees."



 [mystudentfitness](#)

 [mystufitness](#)

 [mystudentfitness.com](#)

Business Plan Competition

Bumper year for 2021



The University's 2021 Business Plan Competition saw a 65 per cent increase in entries on the previous year, with winners sharing a total prize fund of £9.5k.



Organised by Spark, the University's business start-up team, the prestigious competition is open to both undergraduates and alumni who graduated up to 7 years ago. Business plan entries cover two categories: trading and pre-trading.

Kairen Skelley, Spark's Head of Business Start-up said: "It was really interesting that while we had such a large increase in entries this year, the overall standard was as high as always. Perhaps lockdown gave students and graduates the space to really hone their ideas and plans. The judging panel found it tough to select a shortlist of twelve for the presentation stage, never mind decide on the overall winners!"

Team Spark from left to right: Matthew Preston, Kairen Skelley, Richard Doyle, Brian Baillie, Mark Taylor and Ingrid Bale.

Business Plan Competition

Prizes



First Place: Trading

First place in the trading category was awarded to graduate Lyndon Timings-Thompson (Geological Sciences, 2016) for his business We Are Social Enterprise, a recruitment agency that helps disadvantaged and underrepresented groups all over the north of England into work. Now based at the University's flagship Nexus building, Lyndon (26) left a graduate job at a large construction company in April 2019 to start his venture. Despite lockdown restrictions, he and his business partner have already placed dozens of people into jobs. "I'm a big believer in business for social good," says Lyndon. "We're focusing on the construction industry for now, but have plans to expand into the retail and financial services sectors. The prize is fantastic and will go towards expanding our current team."



We Are Social Enterprise
Lyndon Timings-Thompson

First Place: Pre Trading

First place in the pre-trading category was awarded to graduate Connor Moore (Anatomy, 2017) for his venture OSCEpal. Now qualified as a doctor, Connor has developed an app to support medical students through practical exams - an idea sparked when studying with friends for their exams, known as OSCEs. "Typically we practice OSCE scenarios using prewritten cases in textbooks or we write our own. It's difficult to prepare and practice this way, so OSCEpal is bringing this revision into the digital age," says Connor. "It's great to have your idea recognized by business experts, and I'm excited to keep developing the app further with the prize money."



OSCEpal
Connor Moore

Limehouse Special Prizes

Two special prizes funded by Limehouse were awarded by its Managing Director, Nick Howard, who won the business plan competition himself in 2008 and who now helps to judge the competition. Nick gave £500 each to undergraduates Paulina Pawlak (Computer Science with Artificial Intelligence) for her business, Immibox; and Corin Elliott and Sam Murphy (Mathematics) of Turncoat Games. "Both businesses really appealed and the enthusiasm of the entrepreneurs was infectious," explains Nick. "Creating a new board game is something we've not seen before and in an increasingly digital world, it's novel to see students take on such a traditional market. The attention to cultural detail in sourcing products and treats for those living away from their home countries in Paulina's business - including things like creating music playlists and sourcing streamed films in non-English languages - is a lovely, thoughtful touch."



Immibox
Pauline Pawlak

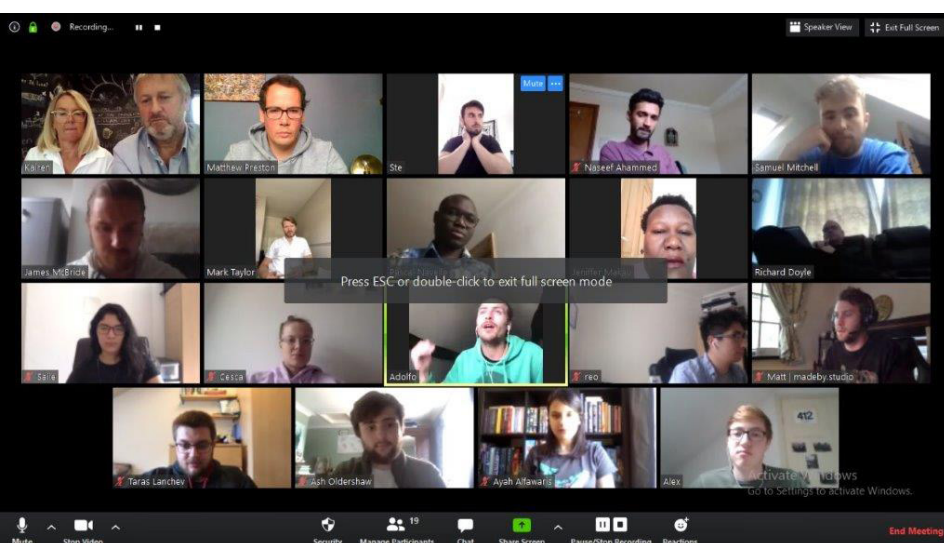
Turncoat Games
Corin Elliot and Sam Murphy

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.

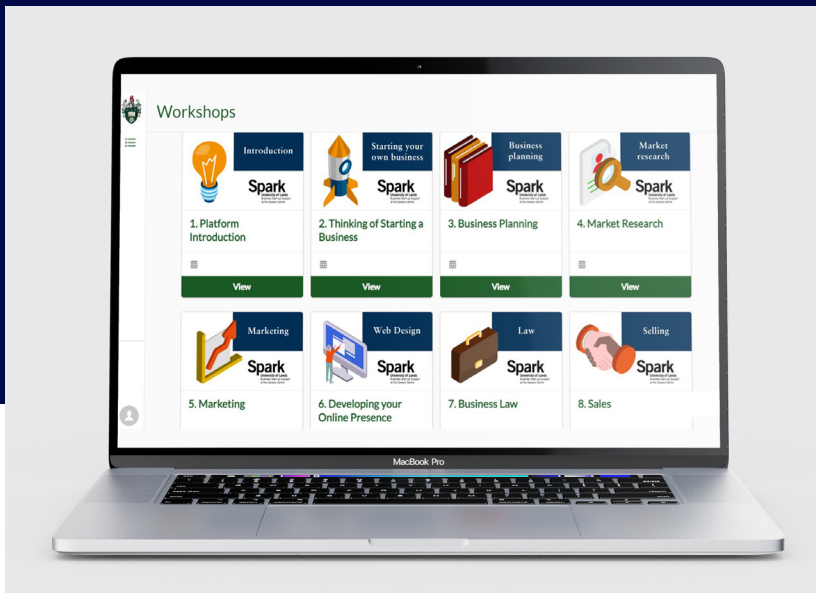



Guest speakers from both alumni donors and Spark alumni businesses bring an added element of learning about the reality of the commercial world and the relaxed feel of the meeting means that everyone is welcome and included.



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 throughout the lockdown.

Synap closes the loop to develop Spark's online enterprise workshops



 synap.ac

 synap



When face-to-face enterprise events became a casualty of the pandemic, the Spark team were determined that student and graduate entrepreneurs would not lose access to the wealth of knowledge and experience of its professional network who would regularly present at Spark's series of workshops.

Luckily, Kairen Skelley, Head of Business Start-up at Spark, knew exactly who could address this challenge – the very entrepreneurs that Spark had helped on their way to developing their own online learning business, Synap.

As medical students in 2016, James Gupta and Omair Vaiyani had created a prototype online revision platform delivering bite-sized and personalised learning for medical students. The platform's structured content helped to keep students engaged, offering elements such as quizzes and multiple-choice questions that medical students could use on their smart phones and on demand – perfect for the social media generation. The concept of their self-directed study environment was so impressive, James and Omair were awarded Enterprise Scholarships to develop their business further.

Since graduating in 2018, the duo have expertly scaled their business and Synap's many clients include a national association of medical students, the University of Law which has 12 campuses across the UK - and thousands of London black cab taxi drivers use Synap's cloud-based platform to prepare for their

Knowledge exam to secure a license to work in the capital. "We'd stayed in contact with Kairen and the Spark team since graduating and had been back to speak with student entrepreneurs several times about our business venture and how we got to where we are," says James. "When Kairen approached us to discuss the possibilities of constructing an online enterprise workshop environment for the University, we were more than happy to help create a bespoke solution, given all the help and support we've had from Spark!"

The result is an online workshop platform using a mixture of webinars, Q&As and links to other helpful resources. Topics include Market Research, Finance, Sales, Business Planning, Business Law, the Role of a Company Director – plus practical advice and tips for dealing with everything that a student entrepreneur might need to know when considering starting a commercial venture. Once registered, students can dip into the bite-sized topics flexibly and on demand and at their own pace. The Spark team is delighted with the result – which James and Omair gifted to Spark for free. Their generosity means that future generations of fledgling entrepreneurs have yet another highly valuable on-demand resource on top of the considerable support that Spark provides.

Says James "It was a pleasure to be able to give back to Spark after everything they've done for us and it's a great feeling to come full circle like this!"

Support for International Students

Beibei Du



Beibei Du (MSc in International Business, 2016) is the founder of Smarter Packaging Solutions, a Leeds-based packaging sourcing consultancy that works closely with established supplier networks in China.

“I was working as an International Business Manager in my hometown of Guangdong, China but had always wanted to study abroad to give a global direction to my career ambitions and personal growth,” says Beibei. “I saw potential in starting a packaging business and as the UK is recognised as a great place for international students to do business, I decided to continue my further education overseas.”

Beibei was directed to Spark by the University’s Careers Centre, and the team took her through all stages of her business planning, providing specific advice on her business plan and provided a series of workshops which gave Beibei an insight into what running her own business would be like. In addition, Spark put her in touch with a range of specialist external advisers including a solicitor and an accountant.



“I took full advantage of the resources and opportunities Spark provided! I started attending a monthly networking event which was a great place to share ideas and talk to people who had already experienced setting up a business. It was a chance to learn so much and in a relaxed environment.”

Last year Beibei took space in the Spark Business Incubator and she hopes her industry knowledge and established supplier network in China will enhance her business and provide a competitive bridge to UK brands and retailers. “The Nexus building is home to so many small businesses and there’s a great mix of international students,” she says. “It’s a place where I hope to create new partnerships and I continue to be supported by Spark’s dedicated business team. I’m proud I studied in Leeds and I’m proud that this is where I launched my business. I am thankful for this opportunity and very excited for the future!”

Support for International Students

Gigi Prongprapa



Following completion of her Master of Arts, Advertising and Marketing degree in 2011, Gigi Prongprapa returned to her hometown in Thailand, but maintained a close connection to her university peers and mentors.

“Since graduating almost a decade ago, I’ve remained part of a global alumni community and it was through these networks I first came across Spark,” said Gigi. “I discovered that they offered a service supporting overseas graduate start-ups, and I had a business idea which I believed was worth discussing and developing.”

Spark worked with Gigi to shape her business plan and turn her idea into a successful company – Suda’s Taste Ltd – which sells an authentic, high quality seasoning mix, directly sourced from Thailand and delivered fresh to the UK. “Since returning to the UK in 2019, it has been an incredibly fun and positive experience.

The Spark team provide encouragement, guidance and support for me and my business, with seminars, legal resources and introductions to experienced business advisors. Through these contacts I’m able to grow my business quickly, strategically and effectively.” Gigi received an outstanding opportunity to move into the Spark Business Incubator and now has a permanent workspace for the next two years.

“Nexus offers flexible high quality office space, and an environment which encourages collaboration with other student entrepreneurs – my business website is being created by a designer I met within the building. I’ve put down roots in the city of Leeds, and I’m going to use my time here to expand into new markets and explore how to trade internationally. Spark has given me the confidence and training I need to look ahead and continue making lifelong connections.”

Where are they now?



As well as supporting emerging entrepreneurs, Spark also enjoys maintaining relationships with many of the start-ups that have previously been through the programme, watching them grow and continuing to support them if required. The two businesses highlighted below were featured in the Spark Impact Report 2017 and have gone from strength to strength.

Too Good To Go

Jamie Crummie



Too Good To Go is a surplus food app, which lets consumers buy unsold food from restaurants, supermarkets and retailers so that it doesn't go to waste. The social impact company aims to reduce food waste, and was co-founded by alumnus Jamie Crummie, Bachelor of Laws (LLB) with Australian Legal Studies, 2014.

"The lightbulb moment was the realisation that UK restaurants sent 600,000 tonnes of edible food to landfill each year and this is playing a huge role in climate change. It just didn't make sense, and this led me to explore the impact technology could have. We are on a mission to change this and our app addresses these two

issues," he says. Nearly six years after its launch, the app now exceeds 40 million global registered users, 5.6 million of those in the UK, and partners with 80,000 businesses from around the world. It's also a huge success in 16 countries such as France, Germany and Netherlands; while the UK, Spain and Italy stand out for their significant growth. Jamie attributes his success to a mix of changing attitudes and an increased demand from both suppliers and buyers. Alongside this, there's an eagerness from the wider business community to step up and seek solutions to climate change.

Where are they now?



“The growth of our app is a tangible example of how fighting food waste is becoming more and more important. The biggest measure of how we’re helping to improve our planet is how many meals – we call them ‘Magic Bags’ - of surplus food we’re diverting from going to waste. To date we’ve saved an incredible six million Magic Bags of food from going to waste in the UK alone.”

Research carried out by the company found that over two thirds of Britons don’t recognise the links between food waste and climate change. To further tackle the issue beyond the app, they’ve partnered with major brands such as Nestle, Danone and Arla on an awareness campaign to simplify food date labelling and correct misunderstandings around when food is safe to eat. The future for Too Good To Go is to continue to scale into new cities across the UK and beyond. To achieve this, the team are creating initiatives targeted at households, businesses, education and policy makers, with the aim of changing mindsets and habits and raising awareness of food waste - as well as giving a sense of urgency to the problem. “It’s not enough that we know how

big of an issue food waste is - we need a change in behaviour,” says Jamie. “Our mission at Too Good To Go is to inspire and empower everyone to fight food waste together, not only through the use of our app but across all aspects of our lives. We’re in a position right now that I never thought was possible when we started in the Spark Incubator back in 2016, and the future is looking really promising and exciting.”



Where are they now?



Tell Studio

Owen Seabrook



BA Film, Photography and Media graduate Owen Seabrook runs an independent production company called Tell Studio, which provides visual content for a broad range of enterprises. Its clients include Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, BBC Sounds and global fashion brand Ralph Lauren.

Owen co-founded the company with Leeds alumnus Lewis Mitchell in June 2019 and together they steer the creative production of the business and its vision to change the way films are made through impactful and sustainable practices. Owen

made contact with Spark in the summer of 2016 with a business idea that he had been thinking about for some time. He was looking for business start-up advice and mentoring, and was keen to learn more about enterprise scholarships.

He said; “I was awarded the prestigious Enterprise Scholarship, giving me the opportunity to develop my business.”

“During this time, I benefitted from office space, financial support, training, mentoring and professional business advice.”

Where are they now?



Spark has been instrumental in the refinement and development of Owen's business ideas and provided opportunities to enhance his learning experience. Highlights of the programme include attending the KAIST Global Entrepreneurship Camp in South Korea and travelling to New York on the Leeds New York student leadership programme. "My university experiences have helped shaped Tell Studio and have given me the knowledge and confidence to bring boundary-pushing ideas to creative and corporate projects," Owen explains.

"We're a core team of three and as filmmakers and storytellers we draw upon our joint expertise and focus on creating meaningful, impactful work. We understand the role we play in telling other people's stories but our ethos is to frame everything we produce in a positive and fulfilling way which propels audiences to the heart of the subject matter."

The production company is ambitious in its pursuit of new compelling ideas and aims to be globally recognised through more branded collaborations, dramatic narrative and exploring new innovative styles of production. Owen also plans to offer informal work placements to undergraduates over the summer period, providing a valuable opportunity for students to build and develop their experience and skills.

Reflecting on his relationship with Spark he said: "There's a

huge number of resources available through Spark for you to better your enterprise skills. The course doesn't end after the lectures – libraries, tutors and departments at the University are all dedicated to supporting you with your ambitions. The resources and support offered by the Spark team are unlike anything available in the outside world. Thanks to their enthusiasm, I've massively improved my personal development and work ethic and they have helped me build my business idea into the creative business it is today."



Small Business Charter



The Small Business Charter is a nationally accepted standard of outstanding delivery of enterprise education, small business support and start up services at Higher Education Institutions across the UK. This is a central government initiative linked to funding for small businesses and delivered through university business schools only.

It highlights the collaborative efforts between the curricular activity of Leeds University Business School, the co-curricular activities of Spark and the strategic activities of the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem of the city of Leeds and the region. The award of Small Business Charter will result in funding secured for the University to help small businesses.

Exemplar

Spark, and the collaboration with LUBS through the CEES, has resulted in being nominated for an exemplar award. This is unique, very prestigious and very rarely done. It is recognition externally for the work that we have done, the strategic route we have taken, and the continuity and sustainability for the future.





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](#)