2024

Impact Report

The Best Place to Successfully Start a High-impact Health or Environment Venture

zinc

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Zinc's Mission

Making the UK the best place to successfully start a high-impact health or environment venture

Our goal is to make the UK the best place to successfully start a science venture which can have a massive impact on the health of people and the planet, and generate exceptional returns on the funding that goes into those ventures. Increasingly, we are building deeper science ventures that serve global, industrial customers in environment and health, giving access to impact at a global scale.

We focus on the inception stage. Inception is about the creation of ventures: turning some exciting ingredients and starting-points (a founder and/or IP and/or part of a team that could solve a valuable problem) into a well-built venture with the right team, commercial focus, science and technology, productivity and roadmap to secure seed-funding.

At the moment, lots of great ventures never get started at all, many others get started so badly they never recover, and many successful ventures that could have started in the UK do it elsewhere. The UK has lots of advantages in the inception stage (given our human, social, intellectual and financial capital for inception). But too often those advantages are dissipated, whilst the competition, especially in the US and China, is getting stronger and more compelling.

We are optimists that the resources to succeed exist – there is a lot of funding, talent, science and know-how out there. But its potential is not being realised and, tragically, there is a huge waste of resources which could be solving our most pressing impact problems at scale, if the inception ecosystem worked better.

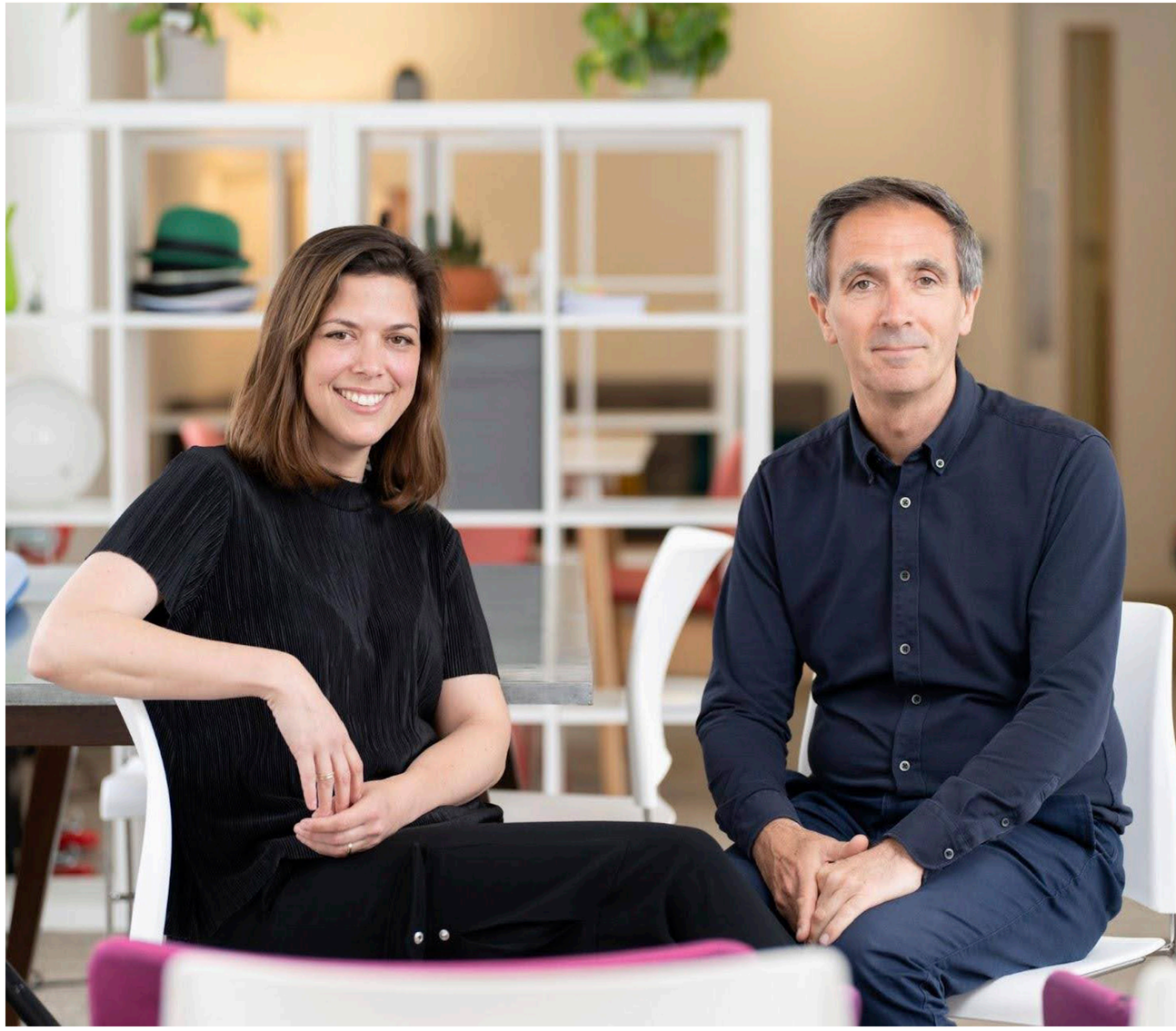
The problems at the inception stage are caused by fragmentation and legacy cultures in the early stage innovation system. Funding is fragmented into grants and investment, and these are fragmented further into ways that don't work for mission-driven innovators at the inception stage. Talent pools are fragmented across deep silos (science, commercial, clinical, type of technology, etc). Creative connections and combinations are unexploited, whilst a lack of diversity means we are missing out on the contribution of the majority of people. Science is fragmented, lacking the interdisciplinary focus it needs to solve big problems, and it is trapped in a legacy culture of a tech-push, linear model of innovation, resulting in masses of unexploited and under-developed IP.

Investment at inception is too often driven by what is frothy, fashionable and even frivolous. Many of the most valuable problems (both societally and commercially valuable) that mission-driven founders want to solve lie in unproven, unfashionable, difficult and even taboo markets.

We have been a mission-driven venture builder since we started. It is the mission focus which gives us, and the UK, the opportunity to overcome the current challenges facing founders at the inception stage. Being mission-focused means focusing on the problem to be solved, and finding the solutions and resources from wherever they can be found. Currently, mission-focused founders too often need to fight against the system at the inception stage, to find and combine the funding, talent, science and markets which they need to succeed in solving their chosen problem at scale. We see our job at Zinc as building the platform which can help them to do that, as easily, rapidly and successfully as possible, so they can get on with building the ventures the world desperately needs. That means having a systematic agenda for tackling the systemic issues in science, markets, talent and funding, so that founders can have the best possible start.

Our agenda is all about Inception for Impact. This report highlights the challenges that need to be tackled and shows examples of our work with founders to fix the inception stage, so that we can empower and enable amazing founders from around the world to solve our most important societal challenges at scale.

PAUL & ELLA
CO-FOUNDERS, ZINC



Science for Impact

Source and invest in high technical risk opportunities in sciences which can unlock impact in health and environment

Backing high-technical-risk ventures is key to accelerating transformative innovation in health and environment, where many of the most important problems require a deeptech solution.

These ventures require a unique approach to early-stage capital that goes beyond traditional VC models – while also attracting world-class commercial leadership expertise to navigate complex markets.

Rather than relying on the traditional view of tech push by inventors trying to find a market, a mission-driven approach focuses on the demand pull for technological breakthroughs from commercial founders who are looking for new ways to solve the valuable impact problems they have identified.

By focussing on high-potential and underutilised IP, fostering cross-sector partnerships and collaboration, and working to bring underrepresented talent into founding teams, we can truly unlock commercial and real-world impact at scale. We do this by:

1. Investing at the very earliest stages with the right and integrated mix of equity and grant funding
2. Bringing world-class commercial talent into deeptech
3. Proactively finding high potential, un-utilised IP with the potential to solve huge valuable problems
4. Addressing the absence of female founders in deep tech
5. Building leadership capabilities and commercialisation expertise in scientists
6. Looking beyond academia to find cutting edge innovation
7. Keeping a laser focus on building solutions that users need

SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

1.

Investing at the very earliest stages with the right and integrated mix of equity and grant funding

Deeptech startups and cutting-edge solutions based on scientific or engineering innovation face significant challenges in the transition from concept through to deployment. R&D cycles are long, capital requirements are high, and there are often complex scaling challenges and regulatory hurdles to overcome.

Traditional early-stage VC models are largely misaligned with the needs of these high-risk, innovation-led ventures. To address this we must collaborate to create new fit-for-purpose funding models and innovation pathways that bring together patient capital from conviction-aligned investors, grant funding and industry partnerships, to unlock capital and support aligned with strategic development milestones.

Clyde Hydrogen Systems

MISSION

Clyde is building a new category of electrolyser with the potential to revolutionise the hydrogen sector and dramatically cut the cost and availability of green hydrogen.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Green hydrogen is a key element in achieving the energy transition to zero carbon. It is produced by splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen using electrolytes powered by renewable energy sources. Existing electrolysers struggle with complexity, high costs, intermittent renewable energy sources and the mechanical compression needed for high pressure hydrogen. Clyde's decoupled electrolysis offers the potential for big improvements in safety, high pressure production, scaling, costs and compatibility with renewable energy sources.

PROGRESS

The science was developed in the research lab of Professor Mark Symes at the University of Glasgow, with support from Leroy Cronin (Chemistry Professor at Glasgow and Founder of Chemify). Zinc led the pre-seed investment into the spin-out company. In total, £1m was needed for the company's first phase of: taking the science into engineering; achieving the first validations of the technology; establishing the right commercial path forwards; building the core commercial and technical team; getting ready for seed stage investment. Assembling sufficient, matching and synchronised funding across grants and equity investment is a huge challenge at this very early stage. A funding package has been assembled which is half grant and half equity funding. The grants are enabling the technical projects to proceed, and the equity funding is allowing Clyde to build the core team and the business. The grants required matched commercial funding. Within the commercial investment, Zinc's commitment was matched with commercial investment from the University and angels. The business has now recruited a strong CEO, James Peck, who joined from a high-growth, VC backed hydrogen venture, and a technical team, led by Matt Lees, a highly experienced CTO who joined from a leading electrolyser company.

SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

2. Bringing world-class commercial talent into deeptech

The ultimate success of IP-led and innovation rich ventures relies not only on their groundbreaking technology, but also on the team's ability to commercialise, move at pace and navigate complex market dynamics. These are often not core skill sets for the scientists and engineers researching and innovating in their fields. Great technical and scientific expertise, paired with world-class commercial talent has a truly compounding effect.

Here in the UK we have an abundance of exceptional commercial talent, and the ability to attract experienced commercial leaders from around the world. These individuals bring experience developing and executing go-to-market strategies, building a compelling strategic vision, fundraising, scaling operations, and building high performing teams. However, too little of this commercial talent pool is currently focused on early stage deep tech opportunities. Connecting this commercial rigour with deep domain expertise is key to bridging the gap between high-potential scientific innovation and scalable commercial success.

Sterling Bio Machines

STEVE GOLDENBERG & AKSHAYA AHUJA

MISSION

Sterling Bio Machines is developing a novel modular bioreactor system to unlock the enormous potential of synthetic biology and biomanufacturing.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Synthetic biology is the next big technological revolution. It will fundamentally change the way we manufacture products across multiple industries – including biopharma, cultivated meat, and sustainable chemicals – forever. The market is valued at around $13 billion and is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 20-30% over the next decade. However, this growth cannot happen without an effective enabling infrastructure layer. This currently does not exist, and Sterling Bio Machines is the right team to build it. Steve is a 3x exited technology founder and CEO, and Akshaya is an experienced engineer with broad industry experience including in bioproduction systems. Steve has transitioned from his commercial success in software to this deeptech opportunity.

PROGRESS

In the past year, the company has made significant technological advances, building and scaling prototypes that have yielded promising early results. They have also developed a proprietary control system to optimise the performance of their bioreactors, been awarded significant Innovate UK funding and won a place on the Innovate UK Global Incubator Programme for Advanced Manufacturing.

SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

3. Proactively finding and commercialising un-utilised IP to solve huge high value problems

Over 22,000 new patents are filed in the UK each year by universities, industry and research institutions. Upwards of 90% of these patents are inactive. The opportunity for seeking out and leveraging high-potential, unutilised IP to create new commercial ventures to tackle some of the most critical challenges facing the health of people and the planet is significant.

Whilst some existing infrastructure (e.g. via tech transfer offices) is in place to spin out and catalyse the commercialisation of IP, there is enormous scope to proactively identify, licence and commercialise untapped, cutting edge innovation with high potential for impact at scale.

Unravel

DR ALEXANDRA OTI, LIZA LEVY & VERONIKA

MISSION

Unravel is a diagnostic tech startup changing the way we research, diagnose and treat women's health conditions.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Unravel is closing the women's health data gap in a world where "our health systems are designed by men, for men" as stated in the NHS Strategy. This is especially true in hormone driven conditions that affect billions of women, and yet our data and diagnostic tools for them are inadequate. Unravel's first product is an at-home, instant hormone monitor which makes seeing and understanding hormones and symptoms as easy as brushing your teeth. For women, it puts an end to lengthy diagnosis and trial-and-error treatment. For academics and companies, it unlocks new data and a female-first way to study conditions and develop treatments.

PROGRESS

Unravel is partnering with leading scientists at Glasgow University, building on a tech platform they have previously developed that can measure up to 16 biomarkers simultaneously and instantly. The IP has been developed with £5M+ grant funding over 5 years and has global patents granted. Unravel has brought a new use case for this IP, along with a strong commercial and medical team to turn the IP into a scalable product and a behavioural-science based approach to building a new approach to women's health. In the last six months Unravel has won a significant Medical Research Council grant, and secured academic and commercial partners, including Boots and Emory University.

UNRAVEL health

SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

4. Addressing the absence of female founders in deep tech

We know that diverse founding teams drive commercial success, build higher performing teams, and deliver VC returns at a higher rate than male-only founding teams. Currently however, just 7% of deep tech startups in the UK are founded by all-women teams. Three-quarters of founding teams are all male and 6 out of 10 deep tech ventures don't employ any women. Within STEM, the UK does have a major gender imbalance amongst the 'E' engineers, but the pool of female talent is much larger in the 'S' in science makes a gender imbalance in deep tech ventures a problem that can be solved much more rapidly.

Early stage funders and innovation agencies must do more to identify, support and fund exceptional scientific and engineering talent from underrepresented groups. Initiatives from the likes of Innovate UK, the Women in Innovation Awards, and emerging STEM-focused mentorship schemes are working to close this gender gap, however more strategic cross-sector collaboration is needed to encourage, support and fund women to enter and lead deeptech ventures.

GutSee Health

DR JOANNA WIECEK & DR KETAKI MHATRE

MISSION

GutSee Health's mission is to decode the human gut through its advanced AI discovery platform, revolutionising the diagnosis and treatment of gut disorders, beginning with IBS.

VISION FOR IMPACT

IBS is a chronic and debilitating gut disorder affecting up to 20% of the population. Around 89% of patients experience severe, chronic pain, diarrhoea, depression and low quality of life. Currently there are no diagnostics available, only symptomatic treatments. GutSee Health's unique AI-Discovery platform integrates complex multi-omics data to reveal complex microbiome-host interactions and gut signatures to diagnose and treat IBS (and beyond). 50% of IBS sufferers seek diagnosis and treatment. This translates to about 15 million potential customers in the UK & USA, with a total addressable market of $1.8 billion.

PROGRESS

The team is developing a platform that combines microbiome analysis, metabolomic profiling, and patient data, to provide a unique fingerprint of the disease for a specific patient. Their tests are non-invasive, don't require faecal matter sample collection and can be done rapidly. By the end of 2025 they are on track to achieve: TRL level 7 with a beta version for AI diagnostics, proof-of-concept for microbiome modulation therapy, and, initially, research revenues.

SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

5. Building leadership capabilities and commercialisation expertise in scientists

Many entrepreneurial scientists have had limited exposure to the business aspects of developing cutting edge innovation through to scale and commercialisation of marketable products and solutions. Particularly in the inception stages of venture building – before teams are funded to the point when they can bring specialist commercial leaders on board – upskilling scientists is critical to maximising long-term success.

Developing skills in leadership, building go-to-market strategies, fundraising, operations, team building, and navigating IP and regulation, is key to bridging the gap between scientific innovation and value-add commercial ventures with the potential to impact industries and lives at scale.

Cambridge Medixine

DR AHMET CAN BERKYUREK & DR ANDREAS CLAAS

MISSION

CamMed exists to deliver safer, easier, and faster medicines and therapies to patients.The team is on a mission to leverage next generation mRNA technology to make therapeutics and vaccines more effective, at lower doses, with fewer side effects.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Due to biological and technological constraints, not all medicines and the technologies used to deliver them work consistently or effectively for all patients. CamMed's vision is to bypass these barriers to enable more effective, more accessible healthcare for all. Their impact will be measured across three vectors: enabling delivery of therapeutics that have previously been unsuccessful; enabling delivery of therapeutics earlier than has previously been possible; and making drug manufacturing more affordable, and therefore more accessible.

PROGRESS

The founding team of molecular biologists has validated its computational modelling work and are now validating the findings in a wet bench environment. This will pave the way to developing and out licensing both the therapeutic backbone of new medicines, as well as pursue their own indications in rare disease. They have built traction with potential partners and customers, securing Letters of Intent from pharma companies keen to leverage their technology.

SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

6. Looking beyond academia to find cutting edge innovation

Tech transfer offices and enterprise acceleration teams in academic institutions offer well established routes to spin out cutting edge technologies. There are also many untapped and under-supported hotbeds of innovation in the UK with the potential to yield a broad range of impactful, scalable research and IP. For example, research developed within established industries, corporate R&D labs, open-source projects, peer-to-peer science and engineering communities, and independent technologists.

Partnering with these organisations and innovators to source and fund high potential science and technology also brings additional benefits, including: more commercially driven ventures, closer links to potential customers and partners, faster R&D and commercialisation timelines, and direct access to specialised lab facilities and talent.

CarbonTwo

DR RUI YAN LEE & MAX SWINSCOW-HALL

MISSION

CarbonTwo is a biotech company on a mission to enable the production of sustainable and clean bio-based chemicals.

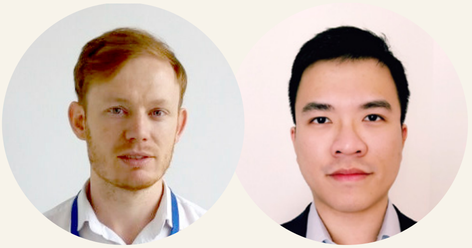
VISION FOR IMPACT

CarbonTwo is developing a novel multi-stage biomanufacturing process to replace the status quo of traditional, environmentally harmful, petrochemical methods using process technology at the intersection of chemical engineering and synthetic biology. Their multi-stage technology has the potential to synthesise valuable organic acids more sustainably and cost-effectively, opening up significant market opportunities. They are starting with the cosmetics industry, and expanding into other high-value sectors.

PROGRESS

CarbonTwo is co-founded by Max Swinscow-Hall and Dr Ryan Lee. Max has a Masters degree in Molecular Biology and a track record commercialising alternative proteins. Ryan is a Chemical Engineer with more than a decade of industrial experience developing bio-derived chemicals and a track record commercialising bioprocess technology. The team has original IP around the design of a Supercritical Water reactor that breaks biomass into shorter chain molecules. Using their enzymatic process they can then turn this into valuable and high-margin chemical products. They have advanced the development of the enzymatic stage of their technology, a critical component of their innovative biomanufacturing process, and have commercial discussions underway with a range of large cosmetics manufacturers.

carbon**two**



SCIENCE FOR IMPACT

7.

Keeping a laser focus on building solutions that users need and will use

The early stage startup trap of building a product without a strategic understanding of user needs is a particularly critical risk when developing deeptech, hardware and science-led innovation. The innovation may be technically groundbreaking, but without validated user demand and a clear route to market, the venture will inevitably fail.

When R&D cycles are long and expensive, business models are still unclear, routes to commercialisation are complex, and founders are required to navigate the nuances of IP and regulatory landscapes, keeping a user-centric approach to development – and iterating with agility from day one – is key to long term success.

Cordon Technologies

JAMIE HUTCHINSON & ANNELISE BRBORA

MISSION

Cordon is on a mission to transform the environmental impacts of viticulture by revolutionising vineyard technology with cost-effective, environmentally sensitive automation solutions.

VISION FOR IMPACT

There are over three million vineyards in Europe. These types of farms are the highest users of pesticides in agriculture. Vineyard farming stands at a complex crossroad. Rising operational and capital costs, labour scarcity, and environmental impacts are daily concerns. Cordon is addressing the environmental impact of viticulture by leveraging cutting edge technologies, reducing pesticide use by 70%, cutting costs and enabling more environmentally sustainable farming. Whilst Cordon is at the cutting edge and intersection of a number of technologies (fluid dynamics, computer vision, robotics, sensors and AI), the company is fundamentally "Farmer-Focused", trying to create products which work in the real world for farmers.

PROGRESS

Cordon's first product is a high-precision sprayer, at the frontier of spraying technology. Their "Farmer-Focused" approach has led them to follow a path in which the new product has to integrate seamlessly with existing machinery and day-to-day operations. It means combining high-precision with low-power. It means being able to save money, as well as saving the planet. The founding team combines the right mix of skills: long experience in running a vineyard; agile product development; PhDs in exactly the right technologies. Their first product combines sophisticated tech with fast-into-use prototypes to learn by working in the vineyard. Their recent pre-seed investment of £840k (including specialist robotics investor Britbots and Fund F, investing in female founders), non-dilutive grants from UKRI, plus access to prototyping workshop PlusX, has given the team the funding, space and expertise needed to get from idea to in-field proof of concept deployment in under a year.

Cordon


DELEGATE
DELEGATE

Markets for Impact

Source and invest in opportunities which can unlock impact in health and environment in underserved and unproven markets

Funding and supporting early stage ventures tackling complex problems in underserved or unproven markets is vital to driving impact at scale. These markets often present untapped potential for transformative innovation. Founders in these areas bring unique insights and deep expertise, allowing them to spot opportunities others might miss.

By addressing urgent but overlooked challenges, founders have the potential to develop and commercialise technical solutions with routes to significant global impact. These ventures may involve higher risks for funders, but offer the potential for outsized returns, especially when addressing critical needs that legacy industries or traditional markets fail to adequately address. We do this by investing in founders:

1. Using deep domain expertise to create new markets that others can't see
2. Creating commercial solutions for taboo issues
3. Applying new business models to huge, complex challenges
4. Applying new technologies to solve problems in overlooked markets
5. Innovating in emerging, but unproven spaces in difficult markets
6. Solving unfashionable problems
7. Challenging the dynamics of difficult legacy markets
8. Tackling important opportunities that don't traditionally appeal to VCs

MARKETS FOR IMPACT

1.

Founders using their deep domain expertise to create new markets that others can't see

Founders with deep domain expertise and lived experience of specific pains are by far best placed to spot unique opportunities, execute on their vision with precision, and develop high-impact innovations that others may overlook.

Their specialised knowledge can help reduce risk, bring competitive advantage, and build solutions that are not only technically advanced, but also aligned with real market needs. Founders who have had first-hand experience of a painful problem are also highly motivated to do whatever it takes to solve it. As such, they are more likely to be resilient, and keep focused on their north star to work through the inevitable challenges and pivots of development and scale.

Material Index

MORGAN LEWIS & ROB SMITH

MISSION

Material Index is on a mission to enable large-scale material reuse in the construction industry.

VISION FOR IMPACT

The construction industry is the UK's most wasteful sector, responsible for over half of the nation's waste. Material Index's vision is to shift the industry from viewing building components as waste to valuing them as assets. By diverting materials from landfill toward reuse, their aim is to reduce waste and increase the availability of low-carbon materials in the market, minimising the carbon impact of new material production. Material Index aims for 30% of all building components to be sourced through their platform by 2030.

PROGRESS

Co-founders Morgan (an architect with experience at Goldman Sachs-acquired low-carbon startup TopHat and Robert) and Rob (a Chartered Engineer working as a property developer) are perfectly positioned to achieve this huge vision. Material Index is currently operational at over 50 construction sites in the UK and generating fast-growing monthly audit revenue, reflecting a growing demand for their services. The engagement of blue-chip clients like British Land and The Crown Estate highlights industry confidence in their potential to transform the construction sector. A contract has been secured with HS2, showcasing their ability to tackle large-scale projects. Grants totalling over £100,000 further support their growth, alongside six proof-of-concept licences scheduled for the second half of 2024.

2.

Founders creating commercial solutions for taboo issues

Despite the potential for significant impact on people and the planet, there are many large problem spaces in environment and health that remain overlooked by funders and founders. This is due to a combination of factors, including: regulatory and logistical challenges, difficulties in demonstrating proof of concept with users, and complex pathways to monetisation at scale which has led to high risk aversion from funders and founders.

We must develop new models of cross-sector collaboration between startups, funders, academia, industry, governments and beyond, to ensure innovators building solutions in these critical – yet neglected – problem spaces get the investment and support they need to get from development to deployment.

Speek

NESSRIN YOUNES & KANU BATRA

MISSION

Speek is on a mission to connect every family affected by self harm to parent-first clinical care, reducing recovery time by 40% and halving care costs.

VISION FOR IMPACT

One in five teens self-harm. It is a hidden epidemic that affects over 10 million families across the UK and USA. Self harm is an incredibly complex health issue, with many factors contributing to its difficulty to solve. There are multiple underlying causes including high levels of stigma and shame, and a chronic lack of access to information and affordable support. Speek's solution for families provides integrated care that is effective and accessible, combining algorithm-driven question sets, clinically developed content, affordable group therapy and a recovery focussed community.

PROGRESS

Speek was co-founded by Nessrin, a psychologist and behavioural scientist with experience in the NHS and startups, and Kanu, a commercial leader from a global high growth health company. Following the launch of their app, the team has enrolled hundreds of participants in clinical programs, built a community of 7,000+ parents, built partnerships with 50+ schools, and now live in NHS clinics. Their engagement, retention and outcomes have exceeded all expectations, with 83% active usage (compared to an industry average for mental health apps of just 17%) and 92% of parents saying they feel confident in supporting their child through episodes of self-harm. They recently raised a $1million pre-seed round to continue evolution of their product and expansion into new markets.

3.

Founders applying new business models to huge complex challenges

There is a vast opportunity to disrupt large legacy industries – such as manufacturing, energy, transportation and construction – with novel technologies harnessing new business models. Subscription and as-a-service based models, marketplaces, circularity, and data monetisation all present significant routes to disruption, value creation and impact in new ways. Finding innovative ways to leverage digital platforms, data analytics and alternative business models in complex legacy markets has a broad range of benefits, including scalability and global reach, operational efficiencies, as well as significant social, economic and environmental impact.

Iterum

JON HOLDEN

MISSION

Iterum is on a mission to bring circular disruption to the $1 trillion global home appliance market.

VISION FOR IMPACT

In the UK, an estimated 2 million tonnes of waste electrical goods, including white goods and home appliances, are discarded each year. Outdated appliances result in unnecessary energy and water usage. Iterum's vision is to make hardware-as-a-service the go-to business model for companies that manufacture and sell physical products. By providing the technology and data insights needed to create and sell circular products profitably, Iterum is driving sustainable, repeatable success for businesses. For users, Iterum seeks to make as-a-service the preferred option by offering a seamless, hassle-free, and cost-effective way to access high-quality, energy-efficient products.

PROGRESS

Iterum is starting with the £1.5 billion market of large property managers. It offers two leading B2B solutions: their flagship Appliance-as-a-Service (AaaS) product, and the Iterum IQ SaaS platform. Together, these products have reduced appliance access and management costs by 20-30%, lowered both embodied and operational CO2 emissions, and minimised tenant downtime, easing workload for property managers.

Iterum has a strong commercial pipeline, with an estimated £100 million in potential five-year contract values. Of this, £2 million is in contract negotiations, with close dates expected within the next six months. New contracts have been signed with major clients, including L&G and Aviva. The company has recently raised £580,000 in external capital to support its continued growth.

iterum

4.

Founders applying emerging technologies to solve problems in overlooked markets

Next generation technologies provide unique opportunities to build and commercialise novel solutions to complex challenges in overlooked markets that have long been underserved by traditional technologies, solutions and funding.

The emergence of – and increasing accessibility to – technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, digital twins, robotics, blockchain, synthetic biology, IoT and quantum computing, will enable significant economic, social and environmental impact in diverse sectors and geographies spanning agriculture, housing, SMEs, healthcare, waste management, transportation, pollution and beyond.

Juno

ARCHIT TIWARI & MAX CHMYSHUK

MISSION

Juno is on a mission to enable small businesses to have access to capital. They are levelling the playing field to make sure that every business can access the funds they need to grow.

VISION FOR IMPACT

The financial industry is highly fragmented and has historically underserved the millions of SMEs that underpin the global economy. Juno is a multi-agent AI platform for lenders and brokers providing loans to businesses. Their technology automates the entire front and middle office for finance providers. This significantly accelerates loan processing, cutting lead-to-offer times for SMEs by up to 95%, reducing costs by a factor of 5–10x, and significantly improving throughput (10–20x) and conversion.

PROGRESS

In under a year, Juno has developed and deployed its platform, signed several paying clients and kicked off pilots with additional large lenders. In just five months of working with Juno, a broker supporting SMEs was able to 10x their loan enquiries, 3x their revenue, and reduce the time taken to process loan applications for three days to three hours.

JUNO AI

5.

Founders innovating in emerging, but unproven spaces in difficult markets

New regulations in environment and healthcare, global supply chain and resource constraints, climate change and changing consumer behaviours and expectations, are creating emergent and exciting greenfield opportunities for technical and business model innovation. Particularly in sectors that have historically been slow to innovate, or disincentivised to adopt new technologies. These shifts are forcing businesses to evolve and operate in new ways.

This is creating an environment rich with new opportunities for startups to build products and solutions to help the businesses affected by fundamental shifts in their sectors to not just survive these changes, but to thrive because of them.

DeepRoots

JOSS ROGERS, EMLYN WHITTICK & MAREK CHALUPNIK

MISSION

DeepRoots is on a mission to help farmers restore ecosystems, increase biodiversity, and boost profitability. Their focus is on agroforestry, enabling food producers to integrate trees into their farming systems, creating resilient land use that sequesters carbon, improves water cycles, and diversifies food production.

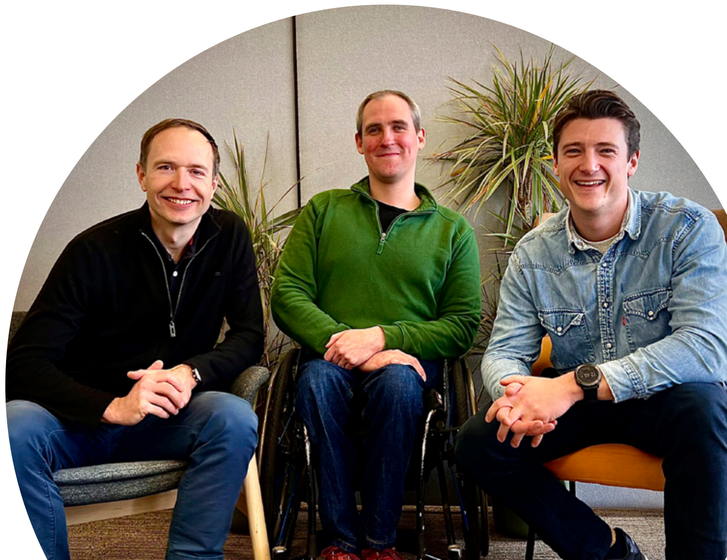
VISION FOR IMPACT

Current monoculture-based farming practices are degrading ecosystems, contributing to one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, 80% of deforestation, and 70% of biodiversity loss. DeepRoots envisions a future where food production works in harmony with nature. By providing financial insights, access to capital, and tools to monetise tree-based products and ecosystem services, they simplify and accelerate agroforestry adoption. Their vision is to build productive, resilient landscapes that restore biodiversity, combat climate change and deliver significant financial benefits to farmers.

PROGRESS

In 2024, DeepRoots launched two projects: a full agroforestry design and implementation with a well-known premium poultry farm and a feasibility study for a major racecourse. The company is on track to generate first revenues by Q3 2024, and expects to accelerate its go-to market in Q4 2024 via its channel partners. It has already engaged with a major UK supermarket and an EU-wide agroforestry project.

These early successes highlight growing demand for agroforestry and bring us closer to transforming food systems with resilient, tree-based farming.



6.

Founders solving unfashionable problems

The technology and investment landscape rides hype cycles around problem spaces and technologies that are seen as trendy and exciting. Consumer wellbeing apps, web3 & crypto, remote working & collaboration tools, and alternative proteins, to name a few, have all experienced recent bubbles. Looking beyond the hype, there are enormous problem spaces that have typically been seen as unexciting and unglamorous to the world of venture.

Vast markets in areas such as waste management, infrastructure, manufacturing, construction and industrial automation can provide opportunity for large-scale technical disruption in resilient markets with the potential for stable growth, and significant impact and returns.

Ride Tandem

TATSENG CHIAM, ALEX SHAPLAND-HOWES & HUW MCLEOD

MISSION

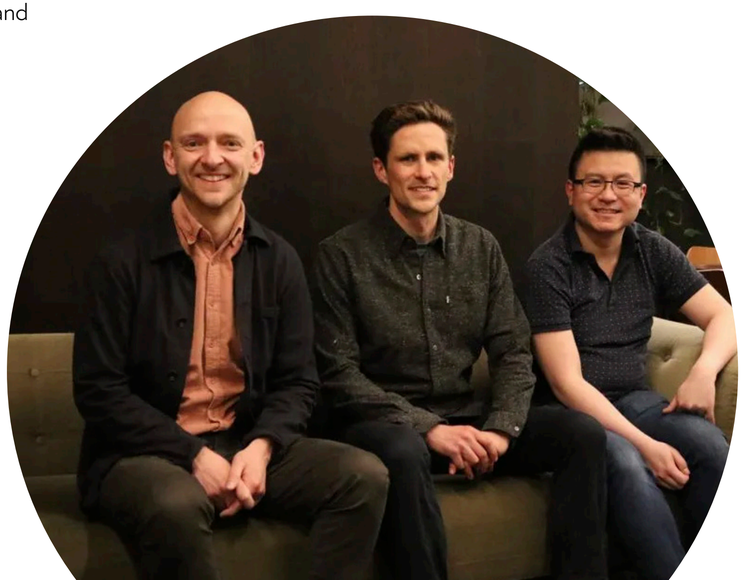
RideTandem is on a mission to tackle transport poverty outside big cities to enable sustainable commuting for all.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Public transport outside of big cities is broken – expensive, unreliable, or simply not there for the people who need it. RideTandem provides fully-managed, reliable and sustainable workplace transport for users that would otherwise be unable to work due to the cost or difficulty of getting from A to B. Their innovative technology connects passengers with local taxi, minibus, and coach companies to create affordable, convenient shuttle services. They are committed to generating positive economic, social and environmental impact at scale.

PROGRESS

RideTandem's mobility-as-a-service platform has unlocked thousands otherwise inaccessible jobs for employees at the likes of Royal Mail, Lidl, DPD and Next. The cumulative wages their technology has enabled is upwards of £88m, and they have enabled carbon reductions of over 528 megatonnes.



7.

Founders challenging the dynamics of difficult legacy markets

Entrepreneurs and innovators building solutions in healthcare, life sciences, climate and environment face particularly unique challenges with complex market, technology and ecosystem dynamics. Many of these critical problem spaces are highly regulated with long development cycles. Legacy technologies, outdated infrastructure, and entrenched or opaque ecosystems, mean slow adoption of new innovations and even resistance to change. Despite these hurdles, innovation at pace in these spaces is desperately needed. Founders that are able to truly understand and navigate these dynamics are well positioned to drive this change and create new commercial opportunities in complex legacy markets.

Zonder

DONNA EGAN & GOVIN MURUGACHANDRAN

MISSION

Zonder is on a mission to transform the outdated way chronic health conditions are managed to create a world where people are not limited by disease – starting with asthma.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Primary care providers globally face a supply-demand mismatch between a diminishing workforce and rising numbers of increasingly complex long term conditions, leading to poor care and reduced practice profitability. Zonder is building a better way to care for chronic conditions. They are leveraging AI and other technologies to deliver care to patients in the comfort of their homes, using digital channels preferred by them. By combining upskilled clinicians and administrators with AI-augmented processes – delivered on behalf of GP practices – Zonder will be able to provide a year of personalised care to patients with chronic conditions for the cost of a single in-person appointment. In the next three years Zonder will deliver high quality care to one million patients with long term conditions.

PROGRESS

The team has developed its asthma cost calculator for GP practices, which is currently in a live trial with 600 patients. This in-practice partnership is enabling them to measure patient perceptions of care, track asthma exacerbations, and calculate the reduction in carbon footprint of the transition to alternative inhalers with lower emissions.

8.

Founders tackling important opportunities that don't traditionally appeal to VCs

There is a misalignment between impactful sectors delivering largely non-digital or human-centric services that could hugely benefit from technical innovation – and funders' appetite to invest where traditional VC unit economics don't apply. While spaces such as consumer health devices, housing, elder care and education may not offer rapid scalability, the convergence of emerging technologies with the adoption of new business models are providing rich opportunities for tech-enabled innovation. By exploring new funding models and cross-sector collaborations, these typically underfunded spaces can now access cutting edge technologies, while delivering returns for investors seeking impactful, sustainable investments.

BelleVie

TRUDIE FELL

MISSION

Bellevie is on a mission to reinvent the future of care so communities are supported to thrive, and all members of the care ecosystem are valued.

VISION FOR IMPACT

The home care sector in the UK is valued at over £20 billion and growing. BelleVie's founders saw a sector where care workers weren't properly valued for the vital work they do, people were receiving one-size-fits-all care unfit for purpose, and a lack of talent to fill the growing need for carers. They set out to change this with an innovative, people-powered, tech-enabled approach to home care. Their proprietary technology platform is: helping more people access the personalised support they need to live independent lives for longer; attracting, empowering and elevating talented carers all walks of life; and driving sustainable, systemic change throughout the care sector to help future-proof the UK's care delivery system for a growing, ageing population

PROGRESS

Venture capital has not favoured businesses who plan to employ large numbers of staff, preferring software ventures and/or gig-work platforms. The whole point of Bellevie is to be a model employer, offering high quality jobs in a high growth industry where the potential for automation is limited. Bellvie has proven a model that works: self-managing teams responding to the needs of users, staff being paid fairly and supported by modern tech, customers paying monthly subscriptions for wellbeing. User satisfaction is the top percentile, with an NPS score of 90%. Industry prizes have flowed, including the top award (Grand Prix) at the UK Home Care Awards. They support over 500 families and individuals to live their best lives. And are now well placed for growth.

Talent for Impact

Find, connect and empower the world-class talent which can have impact in health and environment

Finding, funding and supporting world-class talent is essential for driving innovation, impact and commercial success for high-risk ventures. Unlocking the potential of exceptional talent brings the expertise, creativity, and strategic thinking necessary to navigate the often existential challenges of building cutting-edge technologies and disruptive businesses.

Coaching and mentorship of this talent is key to creating the optimal conditions for their success. In complex and fast-evolving markets, these individuals can accelerate growth, attract mission-aligned investors, employees and customers, make tough decisions and drive scale at pace. We do this by:

1. Identifying and backing diverse founders from untapped talent pools
2. Connecting co-founders with complementary skill sets
3. Building out strong founding and leadership teams
4. Empowering scientists and clinicians through transition to entrepreneurship
5. Backing mission-driven founders who have lived experience of the big societal challenge they are tackling
6. Attracting talented founders from the top multinational companies to build here in the UK

TALENT FOR IMPACT

1.

Identifying and backing diverse founders from untapped talent pools

We know that finding and backing talented individuals with non-traditional startup backgrounds – and those from diverse, untapped talent pools – supercharges a team's capacity to innovation at scale. It fosters innovation and creativity, enables unique perspectives on problem spaces, gives access to new markets, improves returns, and contributes to building a more robust, equitable and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Historically, many founders from non-traditional sectors and underrepresented groups in tech have struggled to get a foot in the door, or haven't even considered entrepreneurship as a viable career path. From day one, Zinc has been committed to unlocking funding and support for exceptional talent across all intersections and continues to hold this core value at the heart of everything we do.

Amanda & Andy

EARGYM

Eargym was co-founded by the highly experienced and knowledgeable ex-NHS CEO Amanda Philpott, and retired DJ Andy Shanks. Two individuals from unconventional startup backgrounds, yet as a duo perfectly positioned to tackle the challenge of hearing loss.

MISSION

Eargym is a research-driven digital health company shaping the future of hearing care. The team is on a mission to improve the world's hearing and advance research aimed at reducing the incidence of dementia.

VISION FOR IMPACT

In the UK, an estimated 12 million people are affected by hearing loss, which accounts for about 1 in 5 people. This number is expected to rise as the population ages, reaching 14.2 million by 2035. Auditory health is commonly neglected and Eargym is changing that with its hearing training app.

PROGRESS

Eargym has now conducted over half a million ear age checks, 70% of which are people under the age of 35. This is significant, with the WHO reporting that half of under-35s are at risk of hearing loss from unsafe listening habits. Their technology has been recently certified as a registered UK Class 1 medical device and they are building out partnerships with large international industry partners.

eargym
love your hearing

TALENT FOR IMPACT

2. Connecting founding teams from different sectors with complementary skill sets

Creating opportunities to bring together, connect and empower talented, mission-aligned co-founders with complementary skill sets from different sectors is foundational to building resilient, successful ventures. These opportunities enable a level of experimentation and serendipity that often wouldn't be possible elsewhere. Well curated incubators, accelerators and communities – combined with specialised wraparound venture building support – can create the ideal inception-stage conditions for starting, building and scaling strong, lasting founding teams.

Sasha & Abhinav

JOEY

MISSION

Joey is on a mission to make child health accessible to any parent who needs it. They are building a platform that connects parents directly to child health experts whenever they want, wherever they are. It's like having a friend who is a paediatrician.

VISION FOR IMPACT

The UK has some of the worst child health outcomes globally among high-income countries. This is unsurprising when you consider how little of healthcare is child-centred and parent-friendly; for instance, only 1 in 3 GPs have received postgraduate paediatric training. Joey's vision is to be a long-term catalyst for a world where every child has the healthiest start, setting the foundation for lifelong wellbeing. Through their AI-powered, paediatric digital clinic, they are providing parents one place they can turn to for all of their child health concerns.

Dr. Abhinav Bhansali is a GP with a special interest in paediatrics. He has 8+ years of healthcare experience across diverse care settings. As an NHS Clinical Entrepreneur and Health & Innovation Fellow, he possesses a profound passion for innovation. Abhi's personal mission is to harness the power of technology to supercharge social innovation. Sasha Nagarajah's expertise lies in taking businesses from 0 to 1 in financial services.

Her experience includes identifying problems worth solving, pivoting businesses based on user research, and finding product-market fit. This has led to building products that people want and are willing to pay for. She has spent 7 years at multiple start-ups, joining as an early employee and driving scale.

As a duo, they are a force of nature. They have truly unlocked each other's strengths, enabling the team to make incredible progress in a relatively short space of time.

PROGRESS

Joey is advancing rapidly toward its mission, with Care Quality Commission registration in progress and their MVP launched in May 2024. The platform has already facilitated over 100 consultations and retained 60% of parents from initial engagement to first issue resolution. Joey has grown its user base 9x in just a few months through word of mouth and channel partners.

TALENT FOR IMPACT

3. Building strong founding and leadership teams

In emergent and uncertain landscapes, a strong leadership team is the key differentiator between ventures that succeed and those that fail. The ultimate success of a venture building cutting-edge solutions based on scientific or engineering innovation hinges on the capabilities, cohesion, and vision of its leadership team. Early stage teams start with one or two pieces of the jigsaw in place, and often need support identifying and filling the gaps as the business evolves. This is particularly important in deeptech, where specialised knowledge and networks are vital.

By building capabilities in teams, and also providing timely coaching and intervention through growing pains, we can equip leaders to be the best, most effective versions of themselves. A winning combination of well supported early stage leaders can navigate complex decision-making, execute at pace, maintain focus on building and commercialising solutions that solve critical problems, and attract mission-aligned investors, customers and partners.

Personal & Team Coaching at Zinc

MISSION

Our personal and team coaching programmes sit at the heart of Zinc's commitment to developing talent. This coaching focuses on the personal journey and development of our founders as individuals and as founding teams. It complements all the advisory and mentoring support they receive on business, product, science, domain and market issues. Our coaches work in partnership with founders, helping them to unlock their potential and maximise their impact. We know that so much of success is rooted in ourselves, our relationships and our mindsets. Our coaching programmes help founders to proactively design themselves to develop their capacity to succeed in their entrepreneurial journey.

VISION FOR IMPACT

We have curated a network of 100+ mission-aligned executive coaches who provide support across all of Zinc's programmes. We offer:

— Executive Coaching for individual founders in our Venture Builder and Catalyst programmes
— Team Coaching for early-stage companies in our portfolio

We match coaches intentionally with individuals and teams for best fit based on profile, experience and need. We help to prepare people to take risks, navigate uncertainty and complexity, back themselves authentically, listen and evolve, and continually reconnect to their purpose and to the people they need around them. Unlike the industry expertise and business mentoring founders receive through our Fellows Network, Coaching is person-centred, focussed on the individual and often looks far beyond a founder's professional persona. Coaching does not give advice but encourages inquiry, engages knowledge, beliefs, focus, and energy through questioning and listening. We believe the potential of coaching is to go beyond the individual, and focus on the impact we need to see through and with those people. This work is entirely confidential between coach and client, allowing a safe space for founders to work through challenges outside of their Zinc relationships.

OUR COACHES

Our coaches come from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. They are united by a mission-first, purpose-led approach, and hold a deep respect for the unique entrepreneurial journey the founders are pursuing. We proactively support our coaches themselves to continually develop themselves and their practice through their time with us. Coaches participate in their own support circles, providing a community and space for sharing and feedback. They also have full access to Zinc's resourcing and events. This approach has enabled us to continually improve the impact of our coaching offering and also feedback directly into the refinement of our talent sourcing and selection process.

4.

TALENT FOR IMPACT

Empowering scientists and clinicians to become entrepreneurs

We meet and support many (often frustrated) clinicians and scientists who are driven to apply their skills, experience to solve big impact problems in health and environment. These individuals are incredibly motivated to have real-world impact at scale. They can face significant challenges in the transition from clinical practice to the world of research and entrepreneurship. While their deep domain expertise provides a great foundation for innovation, challenges arise with the shift in mindset needed from working in high precision environments, to embracing risk, speedy experimentation and being comfortable with many existential unknowns. With the right support, pathways, co-founders and mentorship, clinicians and scientists can become extremely effective and inspiring leaders of high-impact commercial ventures.

Dan Hardy

MICROSOL

MISSION

Microsol is on a mission to revolutionise respiratory medicine, through cutting-edge aerosol technologies that improve inhaled and nasal drug delivery.

VISION FOR IMPACT

Microsol leverages its powerful proprietary combination of advanced aerosol formulation and computational pharmaceutics modelling to enable more efficient and effective drug delivery solutions for respiratory illnesses. Beyond the medical impact of this innovation, ultimately leading to better patient outcomes, Microsol's technology will also reduce the use of environmentally harmful chemical compounds in aerosol-based drug delivery.

PROGRESS

The novel aerosol characterisation and formulation research developed through Dan's PhD in Physical Chemistry, then advanced during his time at the EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Aerosol Science, has shown huge potential commercial application and impact. Following Zinc's investment, Dan is now working with Zinc's health venture building team to advance clinical validation and industrial proof of concept, build out his leadership team, and support his personal entrepreneurial journey as a first time founder.

TALENT FOR IMPACT

5.

Backing mission-driven founders who have lived experience of the big societal challenge they are tackling

One of the founding principles of Zinc is the concept of "Missions as a Magnet". We know that talented individuals with a deep, personal connection to a problem carry the intrinsic motivation, commitment, resilience and rocket fuel needed to do whatever it takes to succeed. This drive often comes from lived experience of the problem they set out to solve.

They are authentic experts from the core of their being. This innate credibility is deeply compelling to the customers, partners, investors and hires they need to convince to join them on their mission towards creating true impact at scale.

Gary Izunwa & Joe Adams

TANGENT

Tangent founders Gary Izunwa & Joe Adams are dedicated to solving the complex challenge of social mobility and socioeconomic inclusion. They are on a mission to create a world where the social contexts you're born into do not limit your career and wealth potential. This mission is extremely personal. Gary is a highly regarded public speaker, sharing his story about how growing up in a low income, single parent home and ticking lots of the less privileged boxes is his rocketfuel for driving change and opportunity for others.

Gary always knew he wanted to have a global impact tackling this challenge – and knew he wanted to do it by starting his own commercial venture. But he didn't know any investors or how to go about starting and building a business. This is where Zinc came in, where he met Joe, a digital product specialist who was equally passionate and mission-aligned around the social mobility space. Together they are building Tangent to drive social mobility in tech.

Tangent is an employee referral platform that combines video technology, AI, mentorship programs and a dynamic marketplace to make employee referrals into technology companies accessible to everyone, not just a privileged few with established networks.

During their 12 months at Zinc, Gary and Joe launched Tangent's MVP and sold enterprise solutions to companies including Multiverse, GoCardless, Aircall and Square. They recently closed a $1.1M pre-seed fundraise, and officially launched their platform out of beta and into the wider market. The team is now focusing on continued product development, scaling their go-to-market strategy and building out the team.

TALENT FOR IMPACT

6.

Attracting talented founders from the top multinational companies to build here in the UK

The UK's innovation ecosystem is unique and well positioned to become the best place in the world to start, scale and commercialise world-leading technical and scientific innovation. We benefit from world-class universities and research institutions, access to government support and grant funding, vibrant and collaborative startup communities, a diverse talent pool, and an ever-growing network of experienced specialist investors.

By fostering a welcoming, compelling environment for international scientists, technologists and entrepreneurs to start and build their businesses here in the UK, we can continue to strengthen the UK's position as a global leader in scientific and technological innovation.

Anna Sandgren & Vineet Ahuja

UNIBLOOM

Unibloom's founders Anna and Vineet met as part of Zinc's fifth venture building cohort, united by a drive to transform the industries that have the most damaging impact on the environment. Together, they are on a mission to accelerate climate action for corporates.

Only four percent of companies currently have transparent and accurately financed climate action plans in place. This is creating significant business risk, with some consumer goods companies reporting that they face losing up to 50 percent of operating income by 2030 if they don't take action. This is an incredibly difficult problem to solve within large organisations, which have to navigate a complex and evolving landscape of targets and regulations, complicated supply chains, siloed organisational structures, manual and disjoined reporting processes, and challenges balancing conflicting short and long term priorities.

With Anna's 25 years of experience leading business expansion and operations at Unilever, and Vineet's decade of software engineering experience at Bloomberg, as a co-founding team they are incredibly well-placed to build the team and technology to tackle this huge challenge.

Anna is Swedish and has spent much of her career working internationally. Vineet is from India and has studied and worked in the USA and UK. They are a truly global founding team, innovating and building here in the UK.

Unibloom's platform integrates climate and financial data in a predictive scenario and simulation tool, enabling faster data-driven decisions and breaking down silos to open up for seamless collaboration between sustainability and operational teams.

In 2024, the team raised a £650,000 pre-seed round, secured partnerships with Unilever and Cloetta, and signed contracts with enterprise customers including Nasdaq-listed Scandi Standard, Redgate, GoodPop, and the Watch & Jewellery Initiative.

Researchers for Impact

Connecting researchers and ventures for collaboration and career development

Working against established, rigid and siloed ecosystems is the biggest blocker we face in unlocking innovation at scale. As allocators of early stage capital, we are uniquely positioned to catalyse cross-sector collaboration here in the UK; transforming innovation pathways to accelerate commercial, societal and environmental impact on a global scale.

Without fostering cross-sector collaboration and exploring bold new ways of working – across industry, startups, funders, academia, research institutes, regional technology hubs, government and beyond – the UK's potential for progress will remain tethered. We all have a role to play in making this new approach to technical innovation a reality.

This type of interdisciplinary collaboration has been core to Zinc from day one. We know from experience that by integrating diverse stakeholders, complex problems can be addressed holistically, fostering innovation at the intersection of sectors and accelerating the time from research to real-world application.

The Catalyst Initiative

Mission-driven programmes to drive real world impact from research

Addressing the huge potential of scientific ideas and innovations that often don't make it to productisation, commercialisation or scale, Zinc collaborates with mission driven agencies to deliver programmes that enable translation of science to real world impact.

Since 2020, we have partnered with UKRI on Healthy Ageing, which was one of the Challenges backed in an earlier UK industrial strategy. Having impact in Healthy Ageing is core to Zinc's mission, and we have been aligned closely with the UKRI's Healthy Ageing Challenge since it started. We have delivered the Healthy Ageing Catalyst programme which supports entrepreneurial researchers to unlock the commercial potential of their science and technology research. To date, our partnership with UKRI has provided funding and support to 73 research teams from UK universities. Following on from the success of the initial programme, UKRI has created follow-on funding and support in a Catalyst Accelerator programme for 11 of the most promising teams for commercialisation, and Zinc has also delivered this in partnership with UKRI.

In total, the researchers have benefited from almost £6 million in grants from this Catalyst partnership, as well as a substantial amount of hands-on help as individual teams and in cohorts.

Each programme brings together Zinc's venture building and research commercialisation expertise, the support of our 400-strong network of Visiting Fellows and Coaches. The programmes also involves a number of additional collaborating partners and commercial investors who are committed to this mission.

These research teams have spanned a wide range of disciplines, geographies and backgrounds. Over 60% of participants in the Catalyst programme, and over 80% of the Catalyst Accelerator, are women. We have worked with 43 universities from across the UK (45% of which are outside of the Russell Group) and actively engaged with over 20 Tech Transfer Offices.

"Zinc shed light on every aspect of the proposal and shared their honest opinion and thoughts. Everytime I could see only barriers, they would show me viable options and ways to develop my thoughts further. Zinc has worked flexibly with us ensuring that sessions relate to the (often changing) demands of the changing direction and opportunities, which was needed and very much appreciated. Meetings with Zinc have been extremely valuable for keeping the project on track and our attention on the programme objectives. My coach helped me identify key stressors and prioritise more effectively to keep the project on track."

CATALYST ACCELERATOR 2 PARTICIPANT

Wellcome & Zinc
Building cross-industry collaboration in digital mental health

Zinc is partnering with Wellcome to catalyse cross-sector collaborations that can accelerate the development of effective early interventions for anxiety, depression, and psychosis.

Wellcome, a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health through science, research, and innovation, is working to bridge gaps between cutting-edge academic research and the practical, scalable solutions being developed by industry.

With this partnership, we are hosting a series of in-person and online networking events to help establish collaboration between stakeholders in the digital mental health space, spanning: industry, startups, academia, clinicians, policy makers, funders and people with lived experience.

The first two events in the series have already connected over 600 people, with inspirational content and best practice delivered from the likes of Andrew Welchman from ieso, Barnaby Perks (founder and ex-CEO of Oxford VR), Dr Melinda Rees (CEO of Psyomics), and Zoe Blake from CareLoop.

This partnership is in support of Wellcome's call for its Mental Health Award: Accelerating scalable digital mental health interventions, which will see Wellcome funding a global range of scalable digital initiatives with between £3–7 million per project.

BRUK & Zinc
Building national capabilities in behavioural research

In 2024, Zinc became a member of BR-UK, the Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub. BR-UK is a new consortium funded by UKRI via the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The consortium serves as a leadership hub that is part of a wider ESRC funding programme to build national capability for behavioural research.

An initial research project led by Zinc has identified that early stage ventures offer valuable and underutilised opportunities to apply and advance social science. The findings highlight strategic opportunities for UKRI, ESRC, and other stakeholders to promote a thriving innovation system for social science in commercial startups by supporting talent, testing and refining methods for solution-oriented social and behavioural science, and building a robust ecosystem to accelerate high quality venture science.

Building on this work, we are now focussed on behavioural research specifically, exploring the current landscape of behavioural research, and where the opportunities are to support and advance behavioural research in startups and scaleups. This project has already identified a number of specific barriers and drivers to capability for behavioural research – including leadership buy-in, opportunities with data science, and more. This next phase will identify solutions that address these barriers and drivers in a way that existing solutions such as training courses or online communities cannot.

Innovation Fellowships

Unlocking and accelerating the potential of exceptional postdoctoral talent

Over the past 18 months, Zinc has welcomed two cohorts of Innovation Fellows. These programmes are run in partnership with the NIHR (National Institute for Health and Care Research) and The Dunhill Medical Trust, organisations for which the development and mobility of talented health researchers is a key priority.

Building on the success of the 2023 programme, which supported seven researchers, we are delighted to have recently welcomed 13 new Innovation Fellows to our 2024 cohort.

These multidisciplinary researchers – experts in their fields – will each spend the next 6-12 months immersed in the world of commercial innovation, supporting the development of tech-enabled products and solutions that contribute to health and health impacts of the environment.

Fellows spend time in-house with Zinc, and are placed in a wide range of innovation-led ventures, working in hands-on roles and gaining immersive startup experience. They work with ventures on various aspects of product development and testing, user research, evaluation, data analysis and research partnerships. Innovation Fellows also learn from each other as part of a tight cohort, and receive training, mentorship and guidance from Zinc to support their personal and professional journeys.

These programmes are designed to give Innovation Fellows the opportunity to get immersive experience in relevant, impactful ventures, extend their skill sets, strengthen their entrepreneurial mindsets, and build their professional networks. The ventures they work with benefit from the researchers' deep scientific expertise, accelerating their impact and advancing their in-house scientific knowledge for economic and social impact.

Looking to the Future

The goal of the UK being the best place to successfully start a high-impact venture in environment and health can only be achieved by a social movement. A collaborative community who share our goals for global impact in health and environment and our passion to support founders with their specific missions.

A community which is determined to translate all the resources out there (all the human, intellectual, financial, cultural and social capital) into the best possible platform for Inception, so that founders can take their best shot at impact at scale on our most important societal challenges.

This report shows how Zinc and its growing community of hundreds of Founders, Fellows, Coaches, Partners and Funders are working together to build the best "Inception for Impact" opportunity for ventures in health and environment. It's work in progress, with much more to do.

You can become a part of this movement: by joining us as a founder; joining one of our portfolio ventures; becoming one of our Fellows, Coaches or Partners; investing in our ventures and in Zinc; aligning your grants or co-investment with our platform; helping us source talent, IP and market opportunities; connecting your activities with ours, across the world, across the funding stages, across the sectors.

We look forward to working on this agenda even more deeply with our existing community, and to engaging with new friends and allies who share our goals.

2024

zinc