



Student and Graduate Enterprise

Making real-world impact

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Thank you to our Durham University Venture Lab External Advisory Group

Our External Advisory Group is made up of distinguished individuals from the forefront of industry, academia and the public sector, including a number of prominent Durham University alumni, recognised as leading figures in their respective fields.

- Judith Hartley (Chair)
- Amer Baig
- Edward Twiddy
- Jonathan Hazan
- Luke Young
- Matt Penneycard
- Natasha Boulding
- Neil Hunt
- Priya Guha MBE
- Steve Jackson



Scan here to meet the team or go to durham.ac.uk/venturelabteam

Welcome

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this brochure celebrating the achievements of our aspiring young entrepreneurs.

At Durham we continue to attract the greatest minds and most talented students, irrespective of nationality, culture and background; the benefits of our impressive wider student experience are reflected in the achievements of our students.

Our Hazan Venture Lab is a dedicated entrepreneurial space designed to help students to explore their business ideas independently from their chosen field of study. In the last five years, our students have worked with the Venture Lab team to create 140 purpose-driven new startups. The focus of Venture Lab startups is on sustainable innovation with the potential to scale. With this support, our students have a significant opportunity to achieve meaningful change and realise positive global impact.

To name two examples of many, one of our startups, Low Carbon Materials, was shortlisted for a prestigious Earthshot Prize in 2023. Our student-led team, Enactus Durham, became UK and Ireland Champions for the second successive year. Their Taka Taka Zero project showcased their dedication to social entrepreneurship and adherence to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We inspire our students and graduates to think like a leader, spark new ideas and deliver global impact.

Through Venture Lab's initiatives, creativity and leadership skills are nurtured and developed as our students tackle many of the fundamental issues facing the world today.

These are the great minds and leaders of tomorrow. We are deeply appreciative of our global alumni community who continue to inspire our students, to lead by example and to support those just starting out on their journey.

There are many examples of the success of our student entrepreneurs. I am confident that you will be as inspired by their application and endeavour as we are.

Professor Karen O'Brien
Vice-Chancellor and Warden






Making real-world impact

Enabling enterprise

> Venture Lab

Venture Lab is a dedicated team of Durham University staff who help students to create new ideas and launch new ventures.

Our work provides:

-  **Inspiration:** igniting passion for purpose-driven innovation and value creation.
-  **Self-belief:** raising aspirations and nurturing confidence to push the boundaries of possibility.
-  **Empowerment:** providing the knowledge, resources and connections to turn ideas into reality.

All our enterprise initiatives are provided through Venture Lab, focusing on three priority areas: sustainable innovation, idea exploration and validation, and the launch and growth of new ventures.

1. Sustainable innovation

Game Changer

An innovation programme that challenges students to tackle a challenge themed on one or more of the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Impact

- Over 1,000 students have participated since October 2019.
- One of the top 21 projects to feature in the UN's SDG Best Practices publication out of 700 nominations globally.
- The basis of a collaborative project between Durham University and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

Enactus

A global community of university student teams delivering social enterprise projects to create a better, more sustainable world. Enactus Durham has over 100 student members.

Impact

Crowned UK Champions in 2023 and 2024 for the impact of their social enterprise projects.

2. Idea exploration and validation

Blueprint Startup Challenge

A premier startup programme providing support for students and graduates to explore and validate early-stage ideas including workshops, networking events, coaching, mentoring and guest speakers.

Hazan Venture Lab

This is Venture Lab's home on campus for aspiring student and graduate founders, a space designed for co-working, independent learning and meetings.

3. Launch and growth of new ventures

Venture Lab Summer Accelerator (VLSA)

Helping aspirational entrepreneurs progress their startup ideas.

Mentoring

Providing high-quality mentoring through our alumni, supporting aspiring founders across various Venture Lab initiatives.

Alumni Entrepreneurs Network

One of Durham's most active alumni groups, hosting regular events that bring together aspiring, current and former entrepreneurs, investors and sector leaders to support founders.

Alumni Angel Investor Network

Enabling students and graduates to pitch ideas for early-stage investment.



Between 2019 and 2024, the Venture Lab team have supported 140 startups to collectively raise £18 million.



Impact of startup and growth support

Venture Lab has helped develop innovative concepts to tackle significant problems in the world including plastic pollution, hunger caused by the effects of climate change, social isolation and sustainable consumption.

With their mission to make the world a better place, 140 startups have emerged since its launch in 2019, with £18 million collectively raised in external funding.

★ Key achievements of Venture Lab's founders

- > Featuring in Forbes 30 Under 30 lists.
- > Winning prestigious national and international awards including Finalist of the Earthshot Prize, Global Student Prize and Great British Entrepreneur Awards.
- > Acceptance onto world-leading accelerators such as Techstars, IndieBio and Entrepreneur First.
- > Featuring in global mainstream press, including Forbes, Wired Magazine, BBC's Dragon's Den and the Financial Times.



Scan here to find out more or go to durham.ac.uk/venturelab



You can also find **Durham University Venture Lab** on LinkedIn

durham.ac.uk/venturelab

Student and graduate case studies

Through supporting and inspiring our extraordinary students and graduates, everyone involved with Venture Lab helps to nurture innovation that positively impacts the world.

The case studies across the next four pages are a sample of this impressive and impactful work.



Alora



Co-Founders:
Luke Young and Rory Hornby

Established:
2019

We have first-hand experience of Venture Lab's dedication to supporting students who are solving the world's greatest problems. The team supported Alora in our early days as we set out to solve world hunger.

Durham University gave us the launchpad to advance to the next stage and propel our growth. Now, we are a multi-million dollar company at the frontier of science with a network that spans the globe.

Luke and Rory built Alora to solve world hunger by pioneering the sustainable future of food with the world's first ocean agriculture system. They are developing the future of agriculture by creating crops that can grow in high salt conditions, such as salt soils in the Mekong Delta or coastal saltwater on their floating ocean farms.

Looking to combat the sustainability restrictions seen in traditional agriculture, they have developed truly sustainable farming systems that use no freshwater, no chemical fertilisers and less land.

Alora uses a particle bombardment system to modify plant callus tissue, activating the salt tolerance mechanism to enable them to grow floating on our oceans or in high salt soils.

★ Key achievements:

- > Featured in Forbes and Wired.
- > Highly Commended Award in Durham University Blueprint Startup Challenge 2019.

"Thanks to Blueprint, we have gone on to raise over \$3.5 million."

Graduates of the world's leading biotech accelerator IndieBio Accelerator.



Scan here to find out more or go to alora.world

The Corporate Law Journal



CEO and Co-Founder:
Saffron Gilbert-Kaluba

Established:
2019

Venture Lab was pivotal in helping me navigate through the world of business. It provided me with a community of like-minded entrepreneurs and some of the best teachers, who still help now if ever needed.

The team helped me strengthen my business acumen and grow into the founder that I am today. Studying at Durham University was the best choice for me at the time as I was able to reach my full potential.

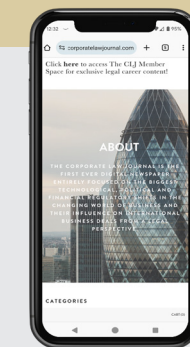
Saffron, along with co-founder, Elinor Nikolova, came up with the idea for The Corporate Law Journal during her first year of studying Law. When renowned speakers from law firms would visit the University, they emphasised the importance of commercial awareness. Recognising the challenges of how difficult, time-consuming and expensive this could be for a lot of students and professionals, Saffron set out on a mission to make the information much more accessible and relevant.

This spark blossomed into the Corporate Law Journal, one of the first digital newspapers dedicated to the political, technological, financial and environmental regulatory shifts in the changing world of business and their influence on international deals. It has grown into a large community of legal professionals and enthusiasts.

Saffron regularly contributes to UK Government policy papers and features on national news broadcasters to share insights.

★ Key achievements:

- > Named in Forbes 30 Under 30 2023 at age 23.
- > Amassed over 165,000 members.
- > Worked with over 100 companies.
- > Partnered with the United Nations.



Formed partnership with Reuters a year after launch.



Scan here to find out more or find **The Corporate Law Journal** on LinkedIn.

Local Energy Systems



Co-Founders:
**Beth Holloway and
Leo Thomson**

Established:
2022

Venture Lab gave us the tools to build and manage a business but also find our feet within the environmental movement and carve out a space for ourselves in the world.

The support of the Durham Alumni Entrepreneurs Network has been greatly beneficial. Connecting with alumni throughout our journey motivates us as we witness their achievements and absorb their valuable insights. We feel very lucky to have been mentored by such inspirational leaders.

This is just the beginning.

Beth and Leo of Local Energy Systems are our rising stars. Their startup is a student and graduate collaboration born out of a shared desire to accelerate decentralised energy development by automating the site feasibility process.

The company looks to reduce the time and cost to set up small-scale energy projects, supporting communities across the UK.

Beth and Leo are passionate about building their prototype in North-East England, recognising that decentralised energy plays a key role in energy resilience, demand management, reduced energy costs and positive community engagement.

With the ongoing support of Venture Lab and backed by Innovate UK as an organisation championing diversity and innovation, they plan to deliver their prototype and continue to make a difference in the local region and beyond.

★ Key achievements:

- > Received two grants from Innovate UK, being recognised from a total of over 2,100 applicants.
- > Awarded £4,000 of the Durham University Social Impact Fund in 2024.



▶ Innovate UK award winners.



Scan here to find out more or find **Local Energy Systems** on LinkedIn.

Taka Taka Zero: Enactus Durham project



I was inspired to be involved in TTZ as I felt I could make a meaningful difference to people and the environment in a sustainable, community-driven way.

The Venture Lab team have been so helpful, from chatting through our ideas, building our skills in areas we found daunting and providing access to an extensive network of contacts as well as use of the Hazan Venture Lab.

The quality time and support in the run up to Enactus competitions was invaluable in getting us ready and confident for the bigger stage.

Without the financial support provided, we may not have been able to get to Kazakhstan to compete in the Enactus World Cup.

Lettie Mantle – Current student and Taka Taka Zero Team Leader

Enactus Durham members receive hands-on experience of delivering real-world projects that positively impact communities, developing their skills in the process.

One of the current projects is Taka Taka Zero (TTZ). Based in Mathare, a slum in Nairobi, the goals of the project include cleaner communities, empowered youths and food-secure families.

TTZ harnesses Kenyan technology, The Community Cooker, to transform waste into energy. This energy is then used to bake bread and create Uji power porridge, which is sold to the community. Young people are trained, learn new skills and gain a stable income.

★ Key achievements:

- > Received £30,000 investment from the Ford Family Foundation.
- > Collected 30 tonnes of waste and saved the equivalent of 97 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the last year.
- > Trained and employed over 20 young people.

▶ Within three months of Taka Taka Zero opening a kiosk, it was profitable and able to subsidise other parts of the business.



Scan here to find out more or go to durham.ac.uk/enactus



Scan here to find out more or go to takatakazero.godaddysites.com

Alumni supporter case studies

The work we do is made possible by our supporters, including our alumni members Jonathan Hazan and Daisy Hill, whose contributions are shared below:



Jonathan Hazan

Studied: Computer Science (1988-1991)
College: Hatfield

The Hazan Venture Lab is our first purpose-built space for entrepreneurship, made possible through a generous £500,000 donation by alumnus Jonathan Hazan.

It has become a specialised home from which our students can embark on innovative enterprise projects to tackle the most significant problems faced by society and industry.

Dedicated to entrepreneurial activities, the Hazan Venture Lab gives students and graduates a positive, supportive environment where they can collaborate and work on their ideas and businesses.



Daisy Hill

Studied: History (2006-2009)
College: Collingwood

Daisy has supported Venture Lab significantly, assisting our entrepreneurial students and alumni in numerous ways. Working directly with entrepreneurs, Daisy has used her expertise to mentor many startup teams, sharing impactful insights from her extensive experience.

Daisy has also judged startup pitching competitions and provided guidance through inspirational talks to aspiring founders. Additionally, she chairs discussions at Durham Alumni Entrepreneurs Network events.

We are fortunate to have Daisy as such a highly active contributor supporting across a wide breadth of Venture Lab's initiatives. We welcome the involvement of our alumni, and there are many opportunities to contribute.



Scan here to find out more or go to durham.ac.uk/venturelabideas

Join our mission

Our mission is fuelled by the generosity and support of our community of alumni, colleagues and partners, who make our work with student and graduate enterprises possible.

Join us on our mission to inspire the next generation of innovative leaders and entrepreneurs emerging from Durham University.

Get involved

There are a range of ways you can support our mission, whether this be through a donation or contributing your time, from one-offs to regular involvement. We are grateful for any time and support you can offer wherever you are around the globe.

- **Donate:** We rely on the generosity of our community to deliver our initiatives including prize, scholarship and programme funding.
- **Volunteer:** Whether as a mentor, a speaker at an event, or a guest speaker during our accelerator or summer school programmes, there are many opportunities to make a difference with your time and expertise.
- **Join our Alumni Entrepreneurs Network:** A welcoming community of aspiring, current, and former entrepreneurs to foster connections among our graduates.
- **Join our Alumni Angel Investor Network:** A global community enabling student and graduate entrepreneurs to pitch ideas in hope of making connections and raising finance for their ventures.



The impact of philanthropic support, mentorship and networks cannot be understated.



If you want to get involved with Venture Lab, we would be delighted to hear from you, please email chris.gilman@durham.ac.uk or grace.norman@durham.ac.uk

Find out more:
durham.ac.uk/venturelab

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