



Innovation Through Collaboration:

THE IMPACT OF BRITTE

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INTRO- DUCTION

In January 2020, Plus X Innovation and the University of Brighton joined forces to create the Brighton Research Innovation and Technology Exchange (BRITE). Responding directly to gaps identified in the Coast to Capital region, BRITE was designed to provide robust innovation and scale-up support for SMEs, and to be an engine for job creation and economic opportunity. With total project costs amounting to £10.5million, with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contributing £5million, BRITE places in the top 10% in England for ERDF funds received in the 2014-20 funding round.

Part of the biggest regeneration project seen in Brighton for decades, Plus X Innovation was the first building to open on the Preston Barracks site in 2020, providing SMEs with much-needed access to modern coworking space, equipment and facilities. Situated in Moulsecoomb, with the University of Brighton's wealth of academic expertise in business growth and SME innovation on the doorstep the project partners were perfectly positioned to cultivate a thriving research and innovation ecosystem in one of the most economically deprived areas of the UK.

Underpinned by a strong mission to help small businesses succeed and scale, the highly experienced and dedicated BRITE team developed a range of programmes to foster business growth and maturity through employment and product creation, process innovation, and the transmission of deep expertise. Remaining agile and iterating programme design throughout its 3.5 years, the BRITE team have supported over 165 SMEs, provided upwards of 5000 hours of support through its six

programme streams, and contributed to the creation of 164 new jobs, stimulating an additional £16.7million (GVA) in the economy. BRITE SMEs have created new services and products, refined and upgraded existing ones, and incorporated academic rigour into product and service development, drawing on expertise from across 8 University of Brighton schools. BRITE has also proudly supported SMEs flying the flag for sustainability, inclusion, and community interest, with over 60% of BRITE businesses placing people and planet at the centre of their operations.

Collaboration has been at the heart of this endeavour. The unique partnership between Plus X Innovation and the University of Brighton has brought deep academic expertise and modern business together to create a vibrant community of empowered entrepreneurs and creators that will long outlive the BRITE project, placing Brighton firmly on the map as a hub for business growth and innovation.



BRITE gives thanks to the European Regional Development Fund for its contribution to this important project.



PARTNERS

PLUS X INNOVATION

Plus X Innovation creates innovation hubs that unlock potential. One of our hubs located in the creative, cultural, and purposeful city of Brighton & Hove, Plus X Innovation has become a recognised destination for businesses of all sizes to collaborate, innovate, and grow. Our award-winning, seven-story building offers dynamic coworking spaces, media suites, a cutting-edge maker workshop, memberships, communities, lively onsite café and uniquely to our business model, tailored innovation support programmes bolstered by powerful, strategic partnerships.

Practical innovation requires creativity, collaboration, daring, expertise, persistence and facilities. BRITE is the first of many programme-oriented projects led by Plus X Innovation that provide critical resource to businesses on their innovation journeys. The project's success has demonstrated the need and potential for holistic innovation support of this kind, at both regional and national levels.

As Plus X Innovation grows, we will continue to add value to business communities through our innovation hubs and programmes, as well as giving back to the local communities proximate to our buildings and committing to our foundational sustainability principles and human-centred values.



“The BRITE project has been an excellent opportunity for us to deliver on our vision of collaborative and inclusive, place-based innovation. We’ve combined the best of academic and private sector knowledge and skills, with public and private funding, and we have been able to support a truly diverse range of businesses and their leaders. We believe that it has been not only effective in its outcomes but also an exemplar of how best to deliver regional innovation support.”

MAT HUNTER, CO-CEO OF PLUS X INNOVATION

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

At the University of Brighton, we're passionate about our research and knowledge exchange, which enriches our teaching, cultivates partnerships and is recognised for producing significant societal and economic impact. Fresh thinking, interdisciplinary research, and collaborative partnerships with industry, Higher Education institutions, and communities enable us to bring expertise from different fields to address society's most pressing issues.

By aligning our research with local sector strengths and growth areas and leveraging inward investment to fix global challenges, we apply and put that knowledge to work. We focus on real-world issues and make concrete changes in our communities to improve the quality of life locally.

We play a leading role in developing the regional innovation ecosystem – working with economic and business leaders to support innovation and skills-led growth. Our regional programmes provide structured and targeted routes to apply our research-informed expertise collaboratively to address business challenges, contributing to specific local needs and supporting the social and economic health of the Greater Brighton area and beyond.



University of Brighton

“We’re delighted to have been such a key part of the BRITE project. I’m immensely proud of the contributions and leadership from my colleagues, applying our research through innovative programmes and producing an impressive collective impact.

This project proves that by working together, universities, industries and social partners can be so much more powerful in addressing the global challenges such as climate change, enhancing equality and inclusivity, increasing positive health and wellbeing, and enabling creative and sustainable economies to thrive. Together, we can improve lives in our region and beyond.”

PROFESSOR DEBRA HUMPHRIS, VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

BRITE PRO-GRAMMMES

BRITE was designed and executed to promote infrastructure investment and business support, research and innovation. As well as developing 1461m² of high-quality office, coworking and workshop space, the project delivered a comprehensive portfolio of tailored research and innovation programmes.

BRITE developed its programmes by combining the University of Brighton's world class business innovation growth programmes with Plus X Innovation's commercial know-how and experience of supporting scale-ups. Together, programmes were collaboratively designed to nurture peer-to-peer networks and knowledge exchange, and create links with research institutions, other SMEs, corporates, and investors. INSPIRE and Profitnet[®] provided BRITE SMEs with structured innovation coaching, access to collaboration and strategic partnerships, and wide-

ranging support on accessing finance. Access to Expertise delivered tailored research services to SMEs working on specific business growth challenges. Product Foundry provided hands-on support with the design, manufacture, and distribution of physical products in the Plus X Innovation workshop, and Pioneers invited SMEs to learn from and consult established corporates and ecosystem specialists on business development that centered on People and Planet. All programmes created ongoing peer support networks, which programme participants have cited as one of the stand-out takeaways from participating.

Further information on each of the the programme streams is featured in the following pages, including some key highlights taken from beneficiary surveys.



91% OF BUSINESSES SURVEYED INCREASED THEIR POTENTIAL TO COLLABORATE WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS, ACADEMIA AND BUSINESS



OVER
165
SMEs SUPPORTED

ASSISTED THE CREATION OF 164 NEW JOBS

OVER
5000
HOURS OF SUPPORT GIVEN

20 BUSINESSES HAVE PREDICTED A COMBINED ESTIMATED £24.9M IN ADDITIONAL REVENUE OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS



£432,675
WORTH OF SUPPORT GIVEN

470,000 CUPS OF COFFEE

35
ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS

32
PROGRAMMES DELIVERED

29
ACADEMICS ENGAGED FROM 8 UNIVERSITY SCHOOLS

100% OF COMPANIES COMPLETING A BRITE ACCESS TO EXPERTISE PROJECT MADE CONSTRUCTIVE CONNECTIONS WITH UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON ACADEMICS.

The Access to Expertise programme provides businesses with the opportunity to collaborate with academics from the University of Brighton, accessing up to £7.5k worth of specialist research expertise to develop solutions for new or existing products or services tailored to the specific needs of their business, supporting them in their growth journeys.

ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

"I am really excited about where this work could lead us. It really could open a whole new chapter and way to expand the business in ways I hadn't imagined before."

DARIUS NORELL, DIRECTOR, PEOPLE AND THEIR BRILLIANCE



INSPIRE is an open innovation programme developed by the University of Brighton, based on international innovation research and co-developed with SMEs. Through INSPIRE, businesses learn about open innovation, participate in an innovation readiness review, access a suite of digital innovation tools, develop a bespoke action plan, and receive coaching to establish the right partnerships for growth.

INSPIRE

"I'm so excited to be part of this programme drawing on expertise from academia and the local business community. I feel privileged to be given this opportunity to help my business grow."

ROISIN MEREDITH, FOUNDER, WILDLING DRINKS



91%

OF INSPIRE RESPONDENTS SAID THE SUPPORT HAD INCREASED THE LIKELIHOOD THEY WOULD COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS (BUSINESS/ACADEMIA) IN THE FUTURE

91% REPORTED THAT ALL PROJECT ACTIVITIES WERE USEFUL FOR HELPING THEIR BUSINESS TO DEVELOP AND INNOVATE

91%

ACCELERATED THE COMMERCIALISATION OF IDEAS

91%

OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED AN IMPROVEMENT ACROSS ALL BUSINESS SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES

91% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THE SUPPORT HAD INCREASED THE LIKELIHOOD THEY WOULD COLLABORATE WITH PARTNERS (BUSINESS/ACADEMIA) IN THE FUTURE

100%

OF PROFITNET RESPONDENTS SAW AN IMPROVEMENT IN THEIR ABILITY TO CREATE AND ASSESS NEW IDEAS, DEVELOP AND COMMERCIALISE NEW PRODUCTS, PROCESSES AND SERVICES



Profitnet is a peer-to-peer expert led learning programme, developed by University of Brighton, designed to enable companies to learn from one another through expertly facilitated, confidential group sessions - applying learnings to address challenges within their business.

“Profitnet has allowed me to take a look into other companies that are running at a similar level to us. It’s a fantastic forum to get creative and experienced ideas to the everyday problems that we’re facing as a business. That experience that you can tap into is absolutely invaluable. Since starting Profitnet it has given me the confidence to expand the company, we’ve actually taken on two new members of staff and we’re hoping to again grow that team.”

SOLOMON SMITH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, SMITH & CO GALLERIES

PROFITNET

GROWTH & RECOVERY PROGRAMME

This masterclass programme was designed to increase understanding of innovation, address the different stages in the innovation journey and to enhance innovation skills to help companies foster agility and gain a greater understanding of the financial landscape relevant to SMEs.

“In a time of business critical decisions, in relation to changing landscapes of operation around COVID and impacts upon businesses, the BRITE G&R Programme provided three mornings of dedicated time to focus on the business strategy now and in the immediate future without interruption, around agile innovation and funding options for growth and recovery”.

SAM WATTS, IMMERSIVE PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR, MAKE REAL LTD



100%
OF RESPONDENTS SAID PIONEERS POSITIVELY IMPACTED THEIR INNOVATION CAPABILITY

88% OF RESPONDENTS INCREASED THEIR LIKELIHOOD TO COLLABORATE

AVERAGE NPS SCORE OF
74

94% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THE SUPPORT HAD INFLUENCED THEIR COMMITMENT TO CREATING / DEVELOPING A BUSINESS WHICH POSITIVELY BENEFITS EITHER PEOPLE OR PLANET



PIONEERS

Designed by Plus X Innovation in response to SME demand, Pioneers was a programme for innovative entrepreneurs and companies committed to scaling in a way that benefitted both People and Planet.

"I can't remember a time I was in the room with so many people with good intentions."

STJOHN SMITH, DIRECTOR, SKILLSMART

PRODUCT FOUNDRY

Product Foundry was an intensive programme for SMEs designing, manufacturing, or distributing physical products - from food to fashion, energy to electronics, and homewares to healthcare. The programme was designed to be a concentrated and focused experience, ranging from three to seven days, and working directly with tools and equipment in the Plus X Innovation workshop. SMEs had hands-on support and training from workshop teams.

Co-designed and delivered by Plus X Innovation and the University of Brighton, Product Foundry empowered companies wanting to learn how to make sustainable physical products and build a design-led business that could thrive in a new circular economy.

"It made me rethink what I want to do entirely. I did want to build a new product business but realised I'd prefer to work with other people to build products which are more sustainable and rely on healthy supply chains. Maybe the world doesn't need new products but rather products which are built to higher standards in terms of their environmental impact. This means working in co-operation with existing businesses to redesign products and to find healthy supply chains for manufacturing."

BRYN JONES, FOUNDER, NIKSEN LTD



100%
OF RESPONDENTS INCREASED THEIR ABILITY TO COLLABORATE AND NETWORK WITH OTHERS (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

AVERAGE NPS SCORE OF
78

100% OF RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCED AN ACCELERATION IN THEIR PRODUCT DESIGN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

100% OF RESPONDENTS INCREASED SELF-BELIEF IN THEIR ENTREPRENEURIAL ABILITY

SME STORIES

Throughout the lifespan of BRITE, both Plus X Innovation and the University of Brighton have endeavoured to collaborate with businesses committed to generating positive impact within their respective industries. With growth and innovation spanning all programme cohorts, and all BRITE businesses being valued and supported in equal measure, the stories showcased here demonstrate outstanding impact in each of the following areas: Sustainability, Collaboration, Health and Wellbeing, Inclusion, use of Facilities and Local Impact.



HIGH SATISFACTION FROM OUR SMES – OVERALL NET PROMOTER SCORE OF 63

60% OF ALL BUSINESSES COMMITTED TO PEOPLE AND PLANET, ACROSS SUSTAINABILITY, HEALTH & WELLBEING, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE



93%

OF NEW JOBS CREATED ARE LOCAL TO GREATER BRIGHTON/C2C

65%

OF BUSINESSES BASED IN GREATER BRIGHTON/C2C

37 BRITE BUSINESSES PUT SUSTAINABILITY AT THE HEART OF THEIR BUSINESS OPERATIONS SPANNING A WIDE RANGE OF INDUSTRIES, FROM DESIGN AND ENGINEERING, TO TEXTILES AND PET FOOD



OVER 107 COLLABORATIONS

HUNDREDS OF TOOLS AND OVER 50 PIECES OF HIGH SPEC WORKSHOP EQUIPMENT



SUSTAIN-ABILITY

Sustainability has been one of BRITE's fundamental cross-cutting themes since the project's inception. Going beyond reducing waste and cutting carbon, the project embraces a holistic approach to sustainability, including social, environmental and economic sustainability, whereby fundamental changes – driven by need – were assessed, evaluated and embedded within the participating founders' and businesses' values, systems, processes and wider business practices. Sustainable innovation creates a hopeful roadmap for the future, and each of the businesses featured are pioneering in design, process and product creation that give back to the planet.

“We learnt how to use the 3D printer and expanded our knowledge in laser cutting and mould making, all of which will create huge benefits to producing our samples, prototypes and final products.”

VOLUME CREATIVE

PROGRAMME: **PRODUCT FOUNDRY**

Volume Creative is leading the charge in bringing together responsible interior design and sustainably focused materials. Such is their commitment to creating a positive impact on the design industry, the team launched the service, Spared, born from a desire to support brands to reuse their waste. With 2.12bn tonnes of waste heading to landfill every year, their mission is to utilise their design expertise, providing innovative solutions for waste, re-purposing it into something beautiful and giving it another life.

Alongside interior design, *Volume Creative* makes other products, including their ‘Plastic Waste Awards’ for the Virgin Voyages Crew awards and their XOU Light, made from plastic waste and bioplastics.

Volume Creative took part in the Product Foundry programme in May 2022, to develop prototype products utilising materials from their clients’ waste streams and to remanufacture them into new products. Their intention was to procure new skills for machinery and tools through their use of the workshop, ultimately streamlining their processes and gaining the ability to create products and prototypes themselves rather than outsourcing.

Their participation in the programme led to a new team member learning essential design skills in new product development and utilising the advanced digital fabrication tools in the workshop to refine their skills in batch manufacturing: “We learnt how to use the 3D printer and expanded our knowledge in laser cutting and mould making, all of which will create huge benefits to producing our samples, prototypes and final products”.

Since participating in the programme, *Volume Creative* has based some of its manufacturing in the Plus X Innovation workshop. Having access to and knowledge of how to use machinery and tools has meant that they have more control over the quality of products, which empowers them to iterate and develop designs at speed and grow skills and innovation in the team, rather than outsourcing to other suppliers.



“Since I’m still early in my career, it feels like a cheat sheet. I’m meeting with brilliant people who have been through it all and getting their golden nuggets of advice. Profitnet is amazing – I feel like a fly on the wall that I’m getting all these tips and absorbing all this knowledge. I’ve learned so much about business models and from other people’s solutions around the table.”

MARINATEX

PROGRAMME: **GROWTH & RECOVERY PROGRAMME AND PROFITNET**

Lucy Hughes, founder of MarinaTex, is leading the way in eliminating plastic from our oceans. A University of Sussex graduate with a degree in Product Design, Lucy went on to win the Plus X Innovation Disruptors competition and the coveted international James Dyson Award in 2019. Her innovative and sustainable alternative to plastic saw her win a membership at Plus X Innovation in Brighton.

Made from waste from the fishing industry and red algae, *MarinaTex* is a planet conscious alternative to single-use plastic. The material is aimed at providing packaging replacements for products including retail bags and food contact packaging.

Lucy has used the BRITE workshop and programmes to test materials and validate claims for patent protection, as well as manufacturing prototypes and running long-term trials of material properties.

With a new business that was gaining traction fast, Lucy found that she needed more support to help her grow. She has been a regular participant in two BRITE programmes, with each providing a different positive outcome.

She told us during the Profitnet programme, “since I’m still early in my career, it feels like a cheat sheet. I’m meeting with brilliant people who have been through it all and getting their golden nuggets of advice”. Lucy found Profitnet to be a highly productive and beneficial tool: “Profitnet is amazing – I feel like a fly on the wall that I’m getting all these tips and absorbing all this knowledge. I’ve learned so much about business models and from other people’s solutions around the table.”

Having joined Profitnet in the early stages of her business, she discovered that she could learn about peripheral aspects of the company that, at the time, had not crossed her mind. It has also helped her to better understand grants and funding opportunities, which has seen her succeed in her applications. By joining Profitnet, Lucy could foresee challenges that *MarinaTex* may encounter but felt prepared to tackle them thanks to the sharing of knowledge and expertise amongst her fellow business leaders on the programme. Lucy informed us that the support she received on the programme has been vital to the progression of *MarinaTex* and would have been much harder to achieve without it.

“Access to Expertise helped us to get university resource and expertise that we could never afford to have in-house on our own.”

ROADWAYS

PROGRAMME: ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

Business partners James Bailey and Victoria Vasiliaskaite purchased the civil engineering and road asphalt company, Roadways, in 2015, with the intention to turn its traditional culture and processes entirely on its head. It has since been radically transformed into a modern and ethically based organisation and is one of the UK's key members of the road building community. James and Victoria placed sustainability at the heart of their mission, which has seen them recycle 4000 tonnes of main roads in 2020, and 97% of their waste.

CEO James joined the Access to Expertise programme to conduct research and development geared towards innovating new solutions to create faster, cheaper, and longer-lasting road surfaces. After being partnered with Dr Andreas Lampropoulos and Dr Ourania Tsioulou, two principal lecturers in the School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering at the University of Brighton, they began a project of two halves in December 2021.

The main aim of this project was to conduct a 'Proof of Concept' study to evaluate the feasibility of using recycled aggregates from demolished structures as a replacement for conventional aggregates without a significant reduction of mechanical characteristics.

Concrete alone is responsible for 8% of the world's CO2 emissions. To tackle this, the first part of the project was to produce a guide encouraging politicians, construction clients, builders, architects and structural engineers to embrace the substitution of low carbon concrete by at least 30%, with the aim of promoting its use in the industry as the default in the UK. Secondly, the academic team tested and experimented with concrete mix designs in the university's Concrete Lab to produce C30 strength concrete lego blocks fit for building purposes.

Roadways now are increasing their supply of low carbon cement to clients and have already achieved some impressive feats. Their innovative recycled road surfacing project in Southampton was completed by over 20 highly skilled members of their team, and created a recycled road which will last decades longer than the two-to-five years expected from a traditional resurfacing approach.



VOTCH

PROGRAMME: PIONEERS

After experiencing the pain of losing her skin due to topical steroid withdrawal, founder of Votch, Laura Way, vowed to never wear the skin of another being again. She launched Votch in 2016, a values-led, cruelty-free watch and accessories company.

Votch uses cutting-edge sustainable materials to create its collections. Having now built over six collections in a variety of designs, Votch utilises Piñatex, a by-product from pineapple harvests, and AppleSkin, a material made from residual apple juice fibres, to create its pieces. As an organisation with purpose at its core, the business also looks to give back where it can. Every three months they partner with a different charity to whom they donate a percentage of their profits, especially to those who have dedicated their lives to ending animal suffering.

Votch joined the third cohort of Pioneers in February 2023, which they were attracted to because of its focus on purpose-led businesses and its commitment to driving change and creating positive impact. During Pioneers, Votch benefitted from one-to-one partner sessions and illuminating workshops. In particular, they were most inspired by the session

delivered by OLIO on developing innovative business models that navigate the balance between social impact and ensuring substantial revenue, and the Low Carbon Leaders session on the business choices and financial imperatives of introducing sustainability practices in all aspects of day-to-day business activity.

These sessions have galvanised Votch to double down on their social impact and sustainable business themes, "reaffirming their faith" in their business model. They are now working to embed this knowledge into their future strategy. Votch was also picked as one of the key BRITE 'Disruptors', showcasing their innovative product range to local stakeholders and investors at a large demo day of BRITE programme members.

Looking to the future, Votch are looking into diversifying their product range even further, using their cruelty-free materials for other accessories including bags and rucksacks as well as continuously trialling new materials as they are being developed.

“The knowledge and advice from our INSPIRE coach have been excellent and timely. Finding focus groups for research can be expensive, but teaming up with a non-profit in your industry is a win/win.”

JUDGE'S CHOICE PETFOODS

PROGRAMME: INSPIRE



Judge's Choice Petfoods Ltd are the industry experts when it comes to understanding the nutritional needs of dogs and their lifestyles. As well as creating premium nutritional solutions for dogs, their vision is to help pet owners understand the social and environmental impact of pet ownership. This inclusive approach has seen *Judge's Choice* maintain its Royal Warrant, which was granted in 1996 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for the supply of pet food.

CEO Chieko Chester joined the INSPIRE programme in November 2021 with the aim of understanding how a pet food business could educate and support pet owners to become more environmentally responsible.

Chieko felt that pet owners were less aware that by owning an animal, they had an increased responsibility to make sure that they were taking measures to reduce the environmental impact of pet ownership. She felt compelled to explore nutritional solutions that would uphold this vision.

Speaking of their experience on BRITE, *Judge's Choice* said, “the knowledge and advice from our INSPIRE coach have been excellent and timely. Finding focus groups for research can be expensive, but teaming up with a non-profit in your industry is a win/win.”

Since participating in INSPIRE, they have made great strides towards launching new products, including applying for grants, attending a value proposition course run by the University of Brighton's Clean Growth Programme and forging partnerships with manufacturers, as well as working with local charities. Through their BRITE coaching, they also applied for and successfully secured an impressive nine new trademarks.

They are currently working with the University of Brighton to further investigate the environmental impact of pet ownership and how this can be mitigated by pet food choice and manufacturing.

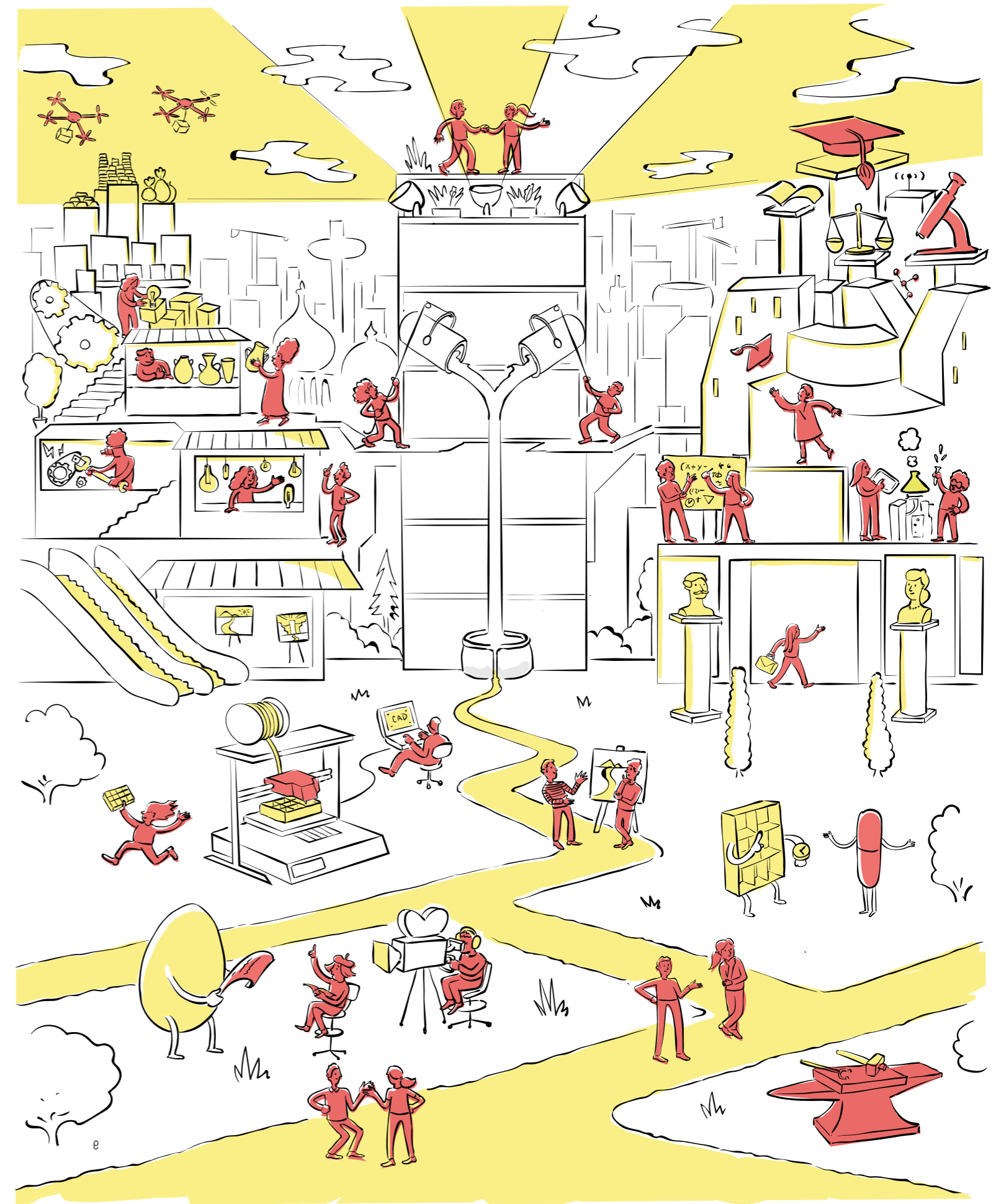




Collaboration is essential to open innovation. By identifying and seeking external expertise at different stages of a business's lifecycle, companies can unlock opportunities for sustainable innovation and growth.

BRITE brought together businesses, communities, and networks to boost connections and ignite new ideas. This facilitation has led to exciting new projects and joint ventures, including peer support and collaborations between SMEs, academics and programme delivery partners. As a testament to these efforts, 91% of businesses surveyed increased their potential to collaborate with other organisations or academia.

COLLABORATION





PRODUCT FOUNDRY: PARTNERS IN COLLABORATION

When James Tooze (University of Brighton's Course Leader in Product Design with Professional Experience) met Plus X Innovation's Workshop Manager, Andrew Sleigh, the two quickly forged a pivotal working partnership. Driven by the belief that building an economy and society that can meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals is urgent and critical, the two experts wanted to design a programme that would empower business leaders to shift their organisations into becoming planet-positive.

After many conversations about integrating professional practice into the curriculum at the University of Brighton, and how to bring teaching skills and academic rigour to a professional audience of learners at Plus X Innovation, James and Andrew decided to launch Product Foundry in 2022. The programme was designed to demystify design for manufacture and tackle questions around sustainable design, particularly on the more material focused concept of design for the circular economy. Participants would be 'learning by making', making physical prototypes in the workshop, tearing down existing products, and conducting rapid lo-fi prototyping of new propositions.

The combination of expertise from the two programme facilitators meant that all bases were covered in the programme. James brought proven

methods of teaching and learning, while Andrew understood the needs of entrepreneurs, founders and designers operating in a commercial context. Together with accomplished guest workshop leaders, they provided guidance, tools and case studies that allowed participants to develop new processes, identify next steps, and identify opportunities for more circular business models in the final programme sessions.

In line with the innovation ethos, the two continued to iterate the programme, refining and honing it to become the most impactful it could be. This included improving delivery formats, narrowing focus, providing tools that offered long-lasting value beyond the sessions and offering more personalised support. One of the key learnings was the importance of having a physical space to run the programme in, as it enabled participants to take time away from the day-to-day requirements of their business and take a more strategic and long-term view.

Product Foundry fed the growing desire of SMEs to embed sustainability into everyday business practice. Plus X Innovation and the University of Brighton's ambition is to continue to run programmes like this to help a new generation of values-driven businesses flourish, continuing to offer space and resource to product-oriented businesses.



23D + H2 PRODUCTIONS

PROGRAMME: INSPIRE

One of the BRITE project's aims was to foster powerful collaborations between businesses. This has become more important than ever after the tumultuous events of 2020-2023 forced businesses to innovate or risk failure. The BRITE project has brought together multiple businesses through its programmes, turning adversity into opportunities for impactful partnerships

23D

Founded by Marc Convey and James Beer, in 2017, 23D is a diverse team of talented producers, technologists, filmmakers, storytellers, and strategists. After three successful years, when the pandemic hit, they lost 90% of their business overnight.

H2 Productions

H2 Productions is a live and virtual events company founded by Martin Leppard in 2000. With live events shutting down almost immediately with the arrival of the pandemic, Martin too found himself in a situation where he needed to act quickly to save his business.

"The best part about being on the BRITE project is collaborating and working with businesses that we wouldn't typically cross paths with who have now become colleagues and friends".

Having both joined the INSPIRE programme looking to diversify their offerings, Marc and Martin's shared challenges became one another's solution, and an innovative partnership was born. Both businesses were entering new territory. H2 Productions had only ever worked on live events, and 23D had only previously worked with remote technicians. However, after meeting through INSPIRE, they realised they could fill one another's skills gaps, with H2 Productions providing the infrastructure for a new venture and 23D running the filming.

During their time on INSPIRE, they refined their partnership and were assigned their own dedicated coaches to help them navigate the project. In Marc's words, "We were constantly finding ourselves at a cross-roads with big decisions to make, so to have a support blanket like the BRITE INSPIRE programme was a real benefit".

Martin, from H2 Productions said: "The INSPIRE programme has been fantastic for us. We started initially with one innovation project and, on meeting our coach, we split it and developed a second project. Then, through partnering with another BRITE member, our two innovation projects have overlapped and come together to form a formal business partnership and a comprehensive innovation that we're now delivering together to market to customers".

When asked about the BRITE experience, Martin expressed: "The best part about being on the BRITE project is collaborating and working with businesses that we wouldn't typically cross paths with who have now become colleagues and friends".

Each left INSPIRE with new clients, a cemented belief in the power of collaboration and the tools to efficiently run an impactful partnership.

CAST IRON CAD & TABTIME

PROGRAMME: PROFITNET

Cast Iron CAD are a Brighton-based product development and engineering company that help businesses take their products from concept to fully realised, offering expertise in niche areas or providing full development cycles.

Director, Dave Lock, initially joined Profitnet in September 2021 looking to learn from the experiences and challenges of other company directors as well as seek help with the development of a new product. Dave fully immersed himself in the programme and connected with multiple different members of the cohort, most notably with Aziz Tarafder from *TabTime*.

TabTime creates medication management products to provide those with frequent and regular medications with reminders, so they don't forget to take them. In particular, the products help those with Alzheimer's and Dementia but can be used by anyone as a solution to their medication management.

After meeting on Profitnet, the two began to work together to help develop one another's product offering. Aziz helped Dave to refine and prioritise his concepts, whilst also providing analysis on their potential success thanks to his expertise in Amazon markets. Dave helped Aziz with a new product that he was struggling to develop. The collaboration saw Dave and Aziz rapidly iterate the product, thanks in part to their access to the 3D printer and other facilities at the Plus X Innovation workshop. Rather than taking six months, it took them just a few weeks to tweak and go into full production.

The two are continuing their collaboration on several other new products. Dave is launching a new business after identifying a need for innovative product manufacturing during his time on Profitnet. Dave has continued to be a very active member of BRITE, having advised on and contributed to delivering the BRITE Product Foundry programme. Through Profitnet, he forged connections with the University of Brighton and has become a member of the University's Engineering Industrial Advisory Board for the School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering. Aziz continues to generously share his expertise in selling on Amazon and continues to mentor other BRITE member businesses.



"Being paired with a coach who runs a purpose-led company was super useful and being challenged about my ideas was hard, but 100% necessary, and so much good has come from it."

BIG EGG FILMS

PROGRAMME: INSPIRE



Big Egg are an award-winning full-service video production company dedicated to working with and for initiatives, businesses and brands committed to making a positive impact on the world. Alongside making innovative video content for clients of all sizes, they are passionate about helping young people from underrepresented backgrounds get a leg up in the film industry.

Big Egg's Director, Adam Sheldon, joined INSPIRE in June 2022 to gain insights on how to reposition the company, form new connections and get wider traction. Adam was also looking for guidance on how to put their mission at the forefront of the business and ultimately to attract brands with similar values and outlooks.

One of the most valuable outcomes of Adam's participation in INSPIRE was working with the support of his coach on generating a fully formed code of ethics for the company to adhere to. The creation of this has seen *Big Egg*

collaborate with brands and companies that match their values and has culminated in the development of mutually beneficial partnerships.

Adam worked with *Social Brighton* to refine their copy so that it would align with their newly established code of ethics, learning along the way how to navigate these themselves, as well as the importance of saying no. Four new partnerships have been formed as a direct result of INSPIRE, and being armed with a fully-realised code of ethics has allowed *Big Egg* to firmly establish its positioning and brand.

Adam says of his experience: "Being paired with a coach who runs a purpose-led company was super useful and being challenged about my ideas was hard, but 100% necessary, and so much good has come from it". As a result of taking part in BRITE, *Big Egg* is now in a prime position to scale and grow through partnerships and is actively looking for investment opportunities.



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic, employee health and wellbeing has been positioned at the forefront of challenges businesses need to tackle. This has resulted in the emergence of exciting innovations in the product and service sectors.

Potentially life and industry-changing technology and processes have been developed on the BRITE programme, including VR art therapies, disruptive community care models and new wellbeing platform tools. We've been thrilled to watch this innovation trend first-hand in our spaces.

KINGSWAY CARE

PROGRAMME: PROFITNET

Kingsway Care is a care provider empowering older and disabled clients to remain in the homes they know and love for longer by providing an unparalleled service. The business is already ranked in the top 20 in the country in its sector. As a fast-growing and highly innovative company, Managing Director, Olly Carter, joined Profitnet in March 2022 to access peer-to-peer networking and to work with others who understand the pressures and responsibilities of running a new business. Having had no formal business training, Olly wanted to gain access to a network he could learn from.

The business has gone on from strength to strength since Olly's participation in Profitnet. During his time on the programme, Olly created recruitment personas for *Kingsway Care* after receiving feedback from fellow Profitnet peers and has seen a significant improvement in staff retention since. His team has grown from 39 to 53 employees since his participation in Profitnet. He is now looking to expand his senior leadership team and has taken on several placement students from the University of Brighton.

Having developed a scaling strategy, Olly is working with the Sussex NHS Trust utilising his ground-breaking digital care planner platform to help the NHS to improve their aftercare practice. He is also working closely with the University of Brighton to identify routes for collaboration that will support Kingsway's strategic growth. Olly has even established a new premises by opening Kingsway Coffee, a successful commercial coffee shop during the day and a thriving community hub in afternoons and evenings.

Olly's commitment to improving professionalism in social care and his championing of compassionate care for independent living has seen Kingsway's revenue grow by 254%, achieve 100% client retention, and the

number of care visits has jumped from 196 per week in December 2021 to 500+ by the end of 2022. He has now firmly established himself and *Kingsway Care* as a disruptor in the caregiving system. This innovation has seen them win 'Business of the Year, Up to £1m' at the Gatwick Diamond Business Awards 2023 and win the Leaders in Care Award in 2022.



HEXAGON HIVE

PROGRAMME: PIONEERS

Having had extensive experience as a CEO, teacher and trainer, Hexagon Hive founder Sam Thomson used her expertise to help other companies to create positive workplace cultures. After seeing an increase in mental health issues in the workplace first-hand, Sam launched Hexagon Hive in 2021 to provide mental health and wellbeing training courses to teams and managers to positively improve people's work and personal lives. The training helps corporates to engage better with their teams and destigmatises mental health interventions in the modern workplace.

Being in her first year of running her business, Sam was attracted to the exciting innovation proposition of the Pioneers programme. As a founder, she wanted to meet other people and feel part of a business community, and Pioneers ticked all the boxes.

Her experience on the programme has been hugely beneficial for Sam. The expert-guided sessions have helped to transform and shape *Hexagon Hive's* offering, which has become more defined and purpose-led since her time on Pioneers in 2022. In particular, the session with *Low Carbon Leaders* helped Sam realise that small businesses still have a part to play regarding the environment. She has since changed *Hexagon Hive's* bank account and phone providers to more eco-conscious providers, planted a tree for every person trained, and prioritises working with businesses whose values align with the ethical choices she is making for her business.

Sam's participation in the programme has seen her extend and deepen her networks, making meaningful business connections that are helping her business grow. She is now ready to scale and is laying the foundations to prepare the company for this. She successfully ran a new workshop about the menopause within educational settings, using her experience as a teacher to guide the session. Having trialled this with a school in North Wales, Sam hopes to roll this out nationwide.



FOCAI

PROGRAMME: ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

Focai was founded in July 2021 by Laith Abbas, a young entrepreneur who joined BRITE straight from college, armed with an innovative vision for an app to support student wellbeing and productivity. Being in the early stages of his business, he enrolled in the Access to Expertise programme in June 2022 seeking expertise to turn his vision into a reality.

Focai aims to improve the academic performance of students by enabling them to manage their time effectively, helping to ease the potential burnout associated with poor performance and overworking.

Following an in-depth scoping meeting, Laith was matched with Dr David Harley and Dr Rebecca Grist, Digital Psychology experts from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Brighton. After exploring the vision and shape of the project with Laith, David and Rebecca designed and tested a framework for the app, which was recently launched as a proof-of-concept digital online service.

Whilst on BRITE, Laith released Version 1 of the app, and the accumulation of learnings from Access to Expertise is now helping to shape Version 2. The critical difference Laith identified for Version 2 is that it needed to be much more passive, working around the user more flexibly. Laith is achieving this by harnessing biometric data from smartwatches and phones to detect stress levels rather than asking students directly.

Thanks to the BRITE programme, Laith received access to specialist expertise to design and conduct focus groups delivering findings that will enable him to make impressive progress in taking his initial idea from concept to market. The next step is further user testing with the current

app, the research from which will provide the prototype for Focai 2.0. The second iteration of the app will become available commercially to individual users but will also have an institutional subscription offering, which will boost the revenue of the young start-up. Laith describes his experience of working with academics: "They are really lovely. There are so many insights I wouldn't have been able to get for another 4-5 years. We are heavily relying on the research from the university for our next stage. Every single finding from this research is going straight into our next product".

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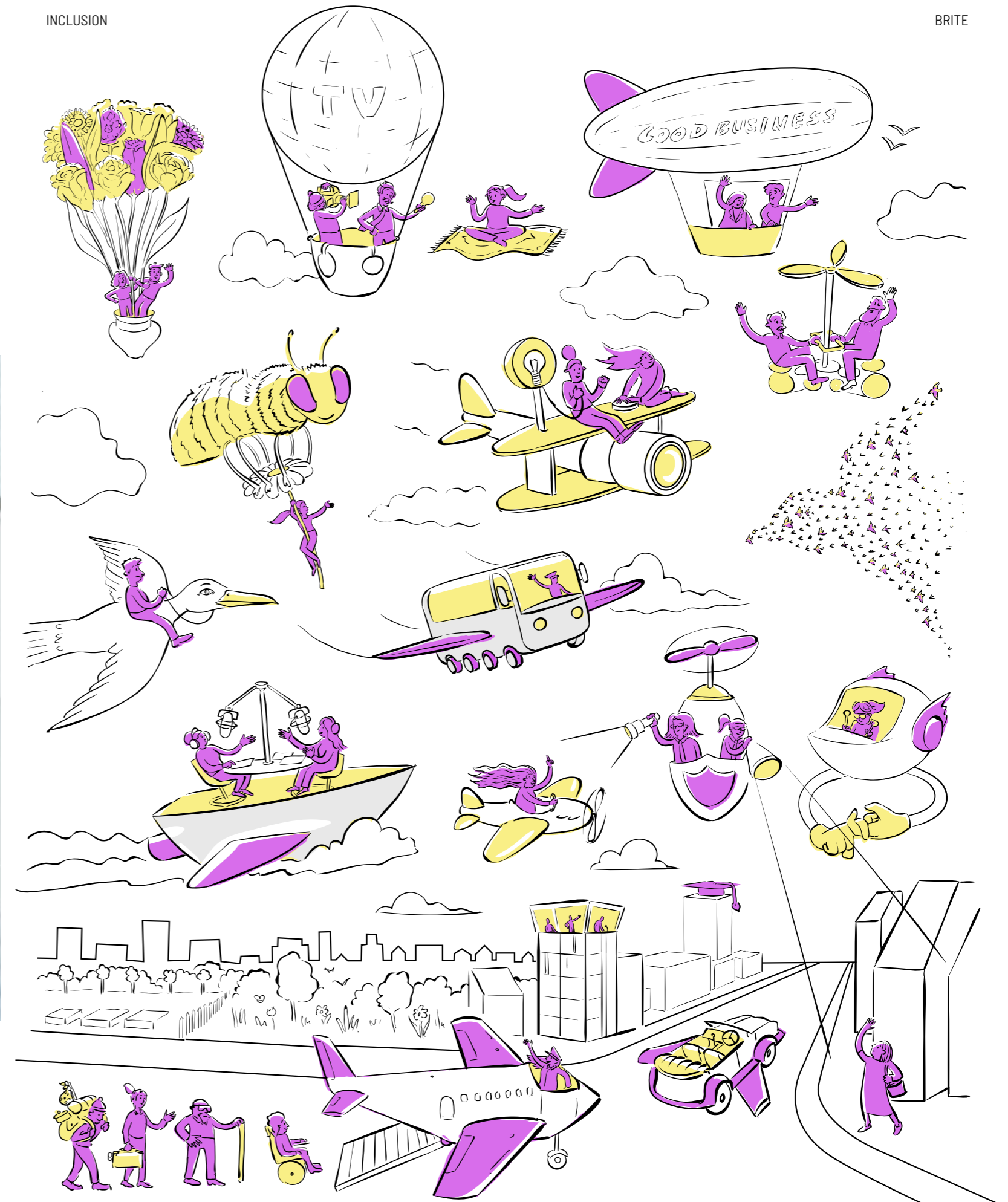


The innovation sector needs diversity; expanding the pool of thought not only creates a fairer system but also creates a more multifarious set of perspectives and experiences, which are vital to developing better solutions to the challenges the world is facing.

BRITE has worked to develop and support founders from underrepresented groups, connected with diverse audiences, iterated its programmes around inclusivity and ensured an eclectic mix of mentors and partners from varying backgrounds were represented.



INCLUSION





CHAMPIONING WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Greater Brighton is home to many exceptional female-led start-ups and scale-ups, boosted by the launch of the BRITE project in 2020. During the second year of the BRITE project, the team endeavoured to increase diversity within the programme cohorts and foster more gender equality across both the project and Plus X Innovation spaces.

The pandemic brought with it new barriers; many founders had to suddenly juggle their business, personal and potential childcare responsibilities. Feedback obtained from founders found that flexible and shorter programmes would make innovation more accessible and minimise barriers. Children, babies and dogs are welcome in the Plus X Innovation space, which enables participants to be productive whilst managing their responsibilities.

The project has significantly overperformed in Equality and Diversity metrics, working with 10% more female and ethnically diverse business owners than exists in local demographics. Between 2022-23, BRITE doubled the number of female-founded businesses taking part in the BRITE Pioneers programme. Participating female-identifying business owners have commented that the sessions have helped them feel more included and able to share challenges in a 'safe' environment.

2ND LINE OF DEFENCE

PROGRAMME: PIONEERS

Motivated by the belief that every woman deserves to feel safe on a night out, Lisa Baskott founded 2nd Line of Defence in 2021 to tackle this widespread issue. The company is the UK's first female-focused private security recruitment agency, addressing the talent shortage of trained and vetted Security Industry Authority licensed door supervisors in the UK. By adopting a diverse and inclusive hiring policy, Lisa seeks to create an agency that genuinely represents city demographics.

Lisa was searching for a more focused programme that aligned with her beliefs around purpose-led social impact and to meet like-minded founders and entrepreneurs in her new hometown of Brighton. She was advised to join Pioneers and found that it delivered what she sought.

Over the two days, Lisa found that the programme and its cohort not only provided her with diverse perspectives on her business model, but her participation opened many doors through its extended networks. These networks have enabled Lisa to reach out to the local press, connect with a local MP, create diversity and inclusion podcasts and events, and eventually, through further degrees of introduction, contact with the national press.

Lisa found support from *The Joyful*, *The Good Business Club*, *Watch This Space* and *Hexagon Hive* most powerful, but credits the whole Pioneers team, cohort, and partners as a supportive network.

Since participating in the programme, *2nd Line of Defence* has been featured in *The Mirror*, a live interview for *ITV London News* and was invited as a signatory in the Security Industry Authority's call for a more diverse and inclusive industry. Lisa said that she can track the beginning of this "blow-up" in media attention to her decision to get involved in the BRITE Pioneers programme. The programme and the community it provided helped Lisa grow in confidence to tell her story, ask for help and step into the limelight.

Lisa is now planning out investment readiness actions, looking at potential business partners and has started conversations with large corporates such as *G4S*, *Primark* and *Virgin*.



FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

PROGRAMME: PIONEERS

Tabatha Fireman founded *Female Perspective* in 2018 in response to the underrepresentation of female photographers in commercial photography. The photography agency provides agent representation for some of the best in female talent alongside end-to-end commercial photographic assignment production services. This venture has helped her clients to create inspiring content with fresh perspectives. *Female Perspective* also supports female-focused charities by donating 5% of the company share from each paid assignment.

Building upon this ethos, Tabatha used the pandemic downtime to plan and grow www.shotbywomen.com, which launched on International Women's Day 2022 as the world's first global stock image library platform to house exclusively female-created content. The platform's purpose is to provide customers with a hub for discovering female talent and to license their content. Tabatha believes this can be achieved by uniting, supporting and promoting contributing photographers, encouraging them to engage and by submitting their content.

The driving force behind both the platform and the talent agency is to transform the visual media we consume daily into a more balanced sphere and, thus, create a more truthful representation of the talent in the photography arena.

Through her experience with Pioneers, Tabatha gained more understanding of partnerships and collaborations and their crucial role in progressing business. As an entrepreneur who is also a parent, Pioneers provided Tabatha with dedicated time and space to get out and collaborate with new networks. The buzz of the collaborative atmosphere and flow of communication during Pioneers has left Tabatha feeling galvanised and excited for the future of *Female Perspective* and shotbywomen.com.



Photo credit: Danni Beach



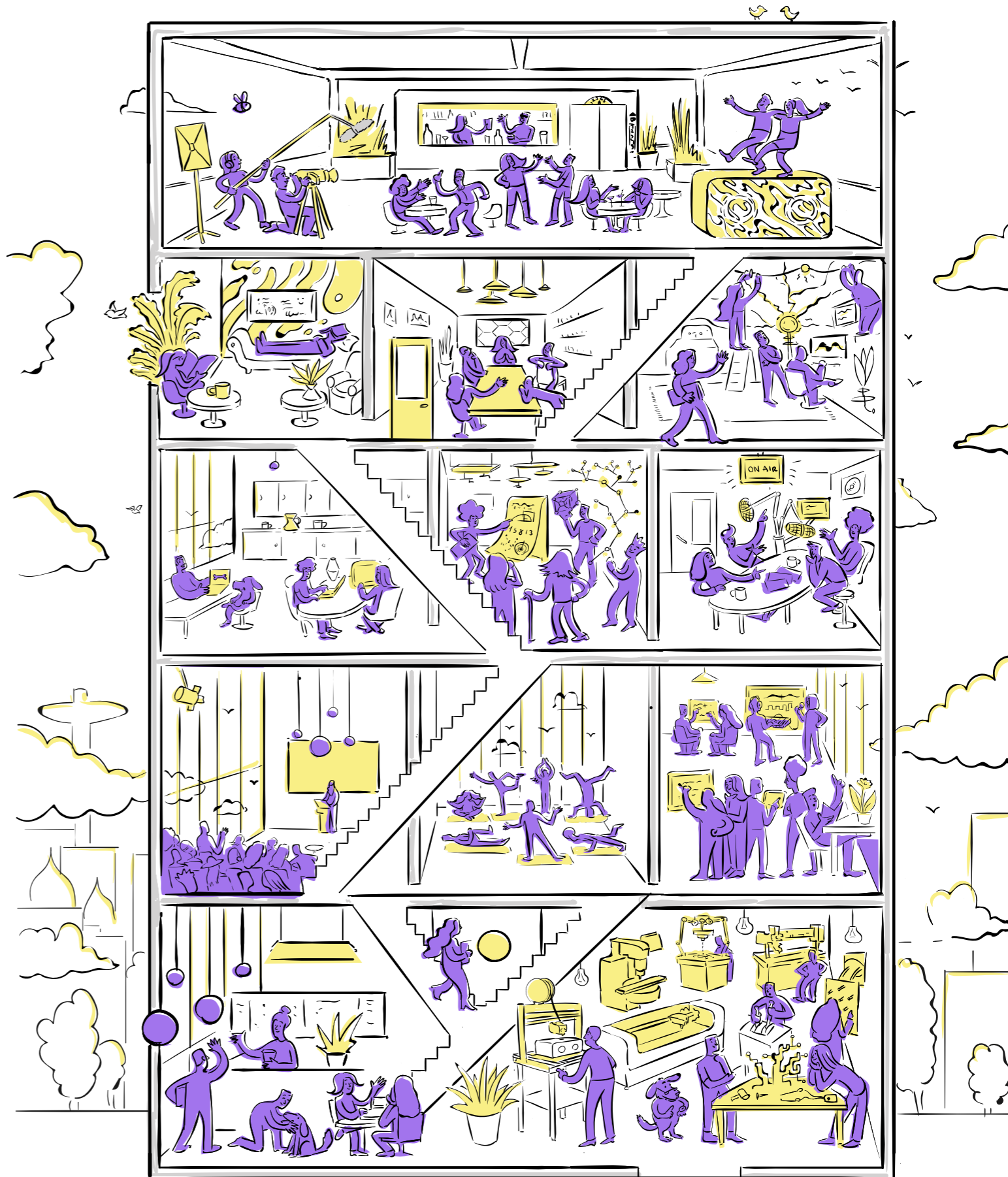


Space alone is not enough to facilitate open innovation. SMEs, scale-ups, and entrepreneurs require space that cultivates and encourages a creative and imaginative culture, with tools and equipment available to promote experimentation, product-testing and implementation. BRITE was formed to foster a culture in which anyone with an idea could have the time, space and resources and to test and develop, no matter the stage of their product or service.

This process is usually laborious, time-consuming and expensive, putting businesses off product innovation. BRITE's access to facilities in the Plus X Innovation workshop allowed participants to overcome these barriers, creating an expert environment to test new ideas at speed.

Many of BRITE's programmes granted cohorts access to some of the most high-spec machinery and tools for batch manufacturing, product prototyping and product tear downs. The Plus X Innovation workshop saw makers, creators and product designers create revolutionary industry prototypes using the digital fabrication workshop, or FabLab and a Batchworks 3D printer farm, which enables users to auto-print small batch runs of product parts. BRITE participants also had access to a state-of-the-art podcasting booth and a vlogging and photography suite.

FACILITIES



“The opportunity to grow our business whilst using an in-house workshop was a highlight, especially the 3D printer, milling machine and laser cutter, which allowed me to create prototypes and test new ideas. The availability of the Plus X Innovation and BRITE team in the workshop is a great asset as they are on hand to fix any technical issues users may experience with the machines. As a young company with young employees, it’s a vibrant place to work and learn from others, which is great for idea generation”.

GOMI

PROGRAMME: PIONEERS

In a world consumed by throwaway culture, sustainable design company, Gomi, is combatting this challenge head-on. Transforming waste plastics into “products for life”, Gomi produce one-of-a-kind statement pieces, including their Collection One Gomi speakers, wireless chargers, and award trophies.

Tom Meades (*Gomi*’s founder and Product Design graduate of the University of Brighton) and his team joined Plus X Innovation as members after discovering the collaborative workspace and state-of-the-art workshop. Tom was also part of the first cohort of Pioneers in September 2022 and was drawn to the BRITE project as he wanted to prototype a new collection of speakers, as well as have an opportunity to work with the university and industry partners.

Tom said: “The opportunity to grow our business whilst using an in-house workshop was a highlight, especially the 3D printer, milling machine and laser cutter, which allowed me to create prototypes and test new ideas. The availability of the Plus X Innovation and BRITE team in the workshop is a great asset as they are on hand to fix any technical issues users may experience with the machines”. He continues, “as a young company with young employees, it’s a vibrant place to work and learn from others, which is great for idea generation”.

Thanks to having 24/7 access to the workshop, Tom found he was able to iterate and troubleshoot designs at speed. *Gomi* used the 3D printer to continuously review samples with the team, meaning that they came to final design much faster than if they were outsourcing. Their time on Pioneers helped to pull their company mission into focus, helping them to highlight and consider any areas that they may have left unchecked.

Since their time on Pioneers, *Gomi* has taken a large studio at Plus X Innovation and launched a new collection of speakers. They have kept using the workshop so that they can continue the pace of their design process. Tom told us, “At Plus X Innovation and during the BRITE project, I took an idea and tested it quickly, including rapid prototyping design and discussing solutions in the big open spaces that Plus X Innovation has to offer, whilst accessing business support which was attractive to me – especially as previously we were working from a repurposed loft!”





PRODUCT, SERVICE & PROCESS INNOVATION

Innovation is the key to company growth and sustainability, and a vital part of the BRITE ethos was to support innovation in all its forms. Application of the principles of open innovation at the right moment in a business's life cycle can make the difference between success and failure.

BRITE programmes have helped businesses to unlock their potential in sustainable innovation and growth through a variety of programmes, frameworks and toolkits. Programme design has been influenced by robust academic research and real world experience which has been curated to support growth in new product or service development and access to new markets and diversification. Many of the SMEs joining BRITE were focused on developing services and products – pre-existing and new – significantly benefitting from the expertise and support of programme facilitators.



“The BRITE INSPIRE programme has enabled us to focus on how we approach product ideation efficiently and where it fits within our strategy. It certainly helped us realise we were going about things the wrong way”.

MAKE REAL

PROGRAMME: INSPIRE

Make Real is an immersive experience solutions studio with a 70% focus on enterprise and 30% on in and out-of-home entertainment. They specifically utilise immersive technologies for good, enabling people to change their behaviours through learning and development training in simulation. Motivated by the belief that immersive experiences can transform how we work, learn and play, Make Real creates collaborative games and VR and AR training experiences.

Founders Robin Scott and Ben Dykes were looking for business support when they found the INSPIRE programme in November 2020: “[We were] transitioning from being a purely agent-driven business model to diversifying revenue streams and productising some of our IP. The BRITE INSPIRE programme was perfectly suited to enable us to understand how to do that”.

Since joining Plus X Innovation as members and participating in a BRITE programme, *Make Real* has deeply embedded itself within the local area. They also started working closely with the University of Brighton on its Games Design course, encouraging the next generation to learn skills for the future.

The BRITE INSPIRE programme has had a considerable, tangible impact on *Make Real* and its methodology: “The BRITE INSPIRE programme has enabled us to focus on how we approach product ideation efficiently and where it fits within our strategy. It certainly helped us realise we were going about things the wrong way”.

Make Real developed a new product since joining BRITE; an irrefutable evidence tool for construction training, providing workers with a VR environment in which they can fail safely.



MAYFIELD HERITAGE

PROGRAMME: ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

Mayfield Heritage Managing Director, Sarah Mayfield, is a building conservator, sculptor and ornamental plasterer who is an expert in saving buildings in distress. She works on commissions for some of the country's most precious heritage building projects, providing condition surveys, and bespoke ornament repair, including for the Worthing Dome Cinema and Claridge's.

After the Apollo Theatre ceiling collapse in 2013, Historic England and the Theatres Trust issued guidance that fibrous plaster ceilings would require an annual survey. However, the majority of these ceiling panels are formed with gypsum and scrim wads, which causes significant problems regarding manual inspection. Sarah decided to develop a technological device that could assist with analysing the deterioration of historical ceilings, particularly when it came to inaccessible places.

Sarah joined the Access to Expertise programme to develop the tool, where she was matched with Dr Pierfrancesco Cacciola from the School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering at the University of Brighton

to scope and design a project to create a damage detection methodology aiming at identifying damaged wads through the measurement of the dynamic response of the historical ceiling. The project would explore how existing acoustic emission technology could be adapted to carry out non-intrusive surveys to identify weakened ceilings that need intervention.

After extensive testing and research in situ, it was determined that laser vibrometer technology could be harnessed to successfully determine the dynamic response of the ceilings. The innovation has established a proof of concept that non-intrusive surveys are a safer, more sustainable practice. For Sarah, applying this method will ultimately save time, energy and money and help her to assess and predict timeframes for the life of these precious ceilings and understand where and when the cracks and deterioration could first occur.

Since the programme, Sarah has begun working closely with the National Trust. The University is also looking to identify potential funding sources for future robotics research to take the innovation to the next stage.



“The best thing about being part of the BRITE project is the access to expertise, the ability to leverage this and help our business”.

NAURT

PROGRAMME: ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

Naurt unlocks new capabilities with true location tracking, a world-first location optimisation software company that leads the way in location technology. Naurt's plug-and-play toolkit provides high-precision tracking to optimise location data. The innovative software integrates seamlessly into an existing tech stack with no need for additional hardware.

Jack Maddalena, CEO and Co-founder of *Naurt* took part in BRITE's Access to Expertise programme in June 2022 to conduct further research and gain an understanding of how efficiently a software developer could integrate *Naurt's* solution into existing mobile apps. Jack was partnered with Dr Khuong An Nguyen, Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture, Technology and Engineering and PhD student Sean Feng, a specialist in this area.

Outside of the programme, *Naurt* developed a weatherproof box with WIFI and an antenna in the Plus X Innovation workshop which was installed on the roof where it began its initial use and testing in real-world environments. A test app was also developed hosting *Naurt's* SDK, which was tested throughout Brighton and Hove.

The project underwent rigorous analysis, including empirical data evidence of the Software Development Kit (SDK) usability and the system performance, providing *Naurt* with potential suggestions for further innovation improvements. Taking part in Access to Expertise and conducting the testing has meant that *Naurt* is now ready to scale up its client base. Thanks to the tailored support they received, *Naurt* has seen them refine and accelerate their innovation process, and they continue to carry their learnings with them.

Through the project, the University was able to advise *Naurt* on potential routes for the next stage of development, including recreating a new interface of the SDK to help make integration faster for customers and easier to do. Ultimately, *Naurt* intends to licence the technology. As *Naurt* is an SaaS company, they will work with enterprise companies to plug this innovation into their tech stacks. When asked, *Naurt* said, “the best thing about being part of the BRITE project is the access to expertise, the ability to leverage this and help our business”.

“A brilliant experience!”

ARC FAB SUSSEX

PROGRAMME: PROFITNET

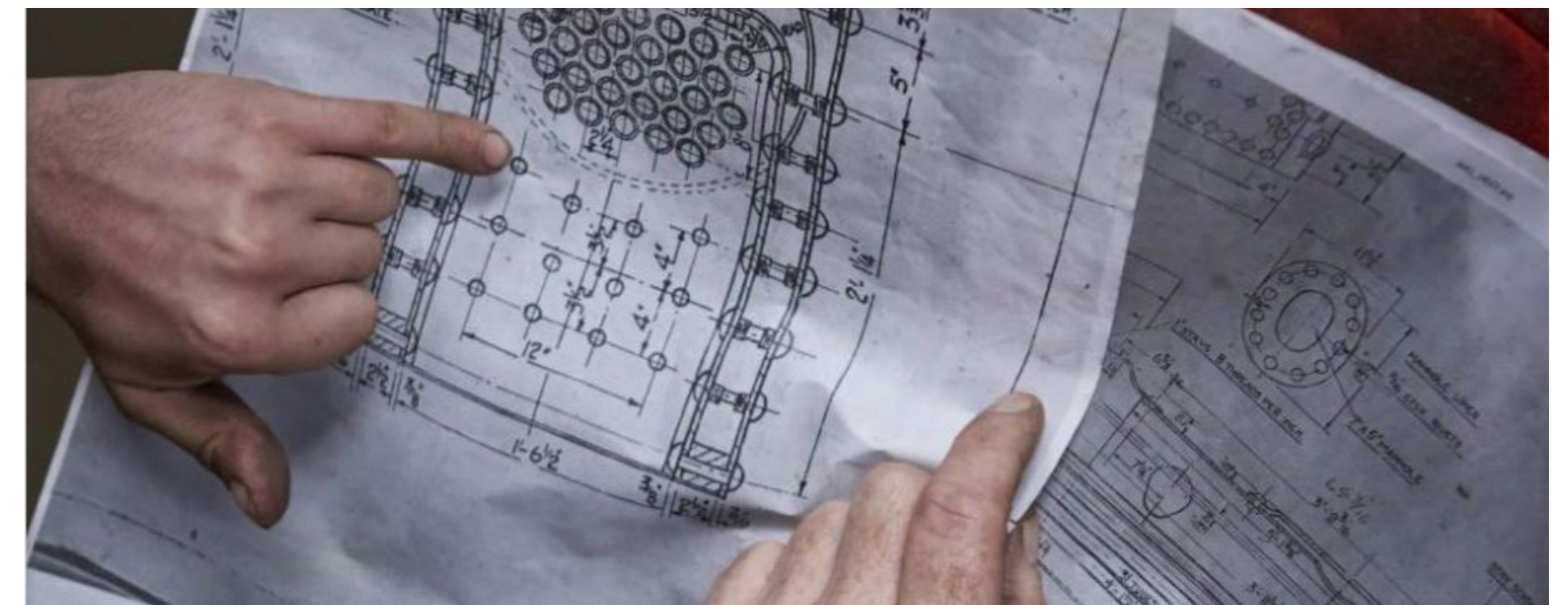
As Sussex's leading provider of structural artisan steelwork in building and construction, Arc Fab Sussex has worked hard to forge a reputation for being reliable, easy to work with and delivering excellence in every part of their work. Arc Fab's diverse portfolio has seen them go from creating large sculptural commissions to rebuilding the hull of a 1926 Thames fireboat.

Director, Toby Ombler, was looking to improve the company's efficiency and ensure that there were days in the month when he was working “on” the business rather than having his head constantly “in” the business. The Profitnet programme ended up being the perfect match for Toby's needs. It gave Toby access to an extensive pool of resources, where he could connect with likeminded business owners, share and learn from the network and gain different perspectives and understandings on his business challenges.

During his time on the programme, Toby made great strides in progressing and developing *Arc Fab* and in driving its efficiencies. One major change was identifying the need to create an office space that would be attractive to new employees and to invest in his current ones. The office refit introduced

new workstations and software to improve the office environment and better systems to manage workflows and sub-contractors. This saw *Arc Fab* employ four new staff members, including an apprentice. Perhaps most impressively, turnover increased from £1.15 million in 2020 to £2.3 million in 2022, and profitability skyrocketed from a loss in 2020 to a £100K profit in 2022.

Having seen the power of optimising operating systems and embracing innovative extra features, Toby wants to continue to develop *Arc Fab* to realise its full potential and match the year's productivity. He plans to train two new management team members, including a Commercial Manager to help consolidate workflows. Toby foresees the next eight years being very busy for him and the company, and his vision of scaling *Arc Fab Sussex* means it will be ready for sale within that timeframe. Toby's final comment on the Profitnet programme: “A brilliant experience!”



"If I hadn't done Profitnet, Trusted Housesitters would not be in the position we are now. I will miss this programme."

TRUSTED HOUSE-SITTERS

PROGRAMME: PROFITNET

Trusted Housesitters has a vision is to be the world's most loved travel solution for pet people. The business solves the biggest problem associated with pet ownership – "I want to go on holiday, how can I be sure my pet will be happy while I'm away?" – by facilitating an exchange of value with verified sitters who look after the pet in exchange for a unique homestay.

Mathew joined the Profitnet programme in March 2022 because in his words: "It's lonely at the top, and I find it interesting to see what others are up to. There is always something to learn – how others are learning and adapting". Since joining Profitnet, the company has doubled in size to over 150,000 members worldwide, with the USA the largest market, and has scaled its headcount to over 50 in the UK and a further 25 worldwide.

They are now focusing on harnessing marketplace network effects to support further member satisfaction and deliver viral growth opportunities. Mathew says that scaling with a trust-based community is challenging as quality is paramount and maintaining member satisfaction is crucial. Growing his team remotely is a challenge but "the group really helped when I was considering my people support. The Profitnet group advice was transformational with a number of issues I brought to the table".

Mathew is now pursuing B-Corp accreditation and establishing the company as a great place to work. He wants to keep growing worldwide, with a particular focus on the US.

His four key objectives are to ensure the sitter experience is consistently delightful, support more members to confirm sits, grow in a sustainable manner and deliver an outstanding people experience.

"If I hadn't done Profitnet, *Trusted Housesitters* would not be in the position we are now. I will miss this programme."



LOCAL IMPACT

By releasing untapped potential in regional areas, economic opportunities can flourish. Research shows that nurturing skills, services and employment in urban areas could boost the national economy by £420m.

BRITE has generated local impact in a variety of ways, from attracting new companies to the area, retaining talent by supporting graduates to start businesses locally, and supporting existing businesses and social enterprises in the region to thrive. By strengthening the innovation ecosystem, and creating a hub in Moulsecomb, BRITE has helped to generate local jobs, encourage inward investment and create economic opportunities locally.



**"It's inspired me to think bigger and keeps me focused.
I have grown my business knowledge. Killer workshops!"**

ACIES CLEANING & SUPPORT SERVICES

PROGRAMME: PROFITNET

Specialist cleaning company, Acies, is proof that innovation is possible in all sectors, including those not typically thought of as active in the innovation arena. George Buko, founder and Managing Director of Acies, is on a mission to shake up his industry and works hard to keep his business ahead of the competition. Having landed major cleaning contracts since being founded in March 2015, including the Plus X Innovation building, the BRITE community have been part of Acies growth journey since 2020.

As an active and engaged entrepreneur, George is always looking to deepen his understanding and gain new tools to grow and improve his business. George joined the Profitnet programme in September 2021 for these reasons, and to connect with a group of likeminded business leaders having experienced isolation as a founder in the past. Profitnet enabled George to work with others who understood his business challenges, and the commitment to a 12-month timeframe piqued George's interest.

During George's time on Profitnet, the Acies team grew from 32 cleaning professionals to 45 and two of his existing team were promoted, taking on leadership roles within the business. He also refined his product offering and introduced these to market - a line of ethical cleaning and washroom consumables for existing clients. The result of this new stock room service was an impressive 200% increase in sales value. George said of his experience with Profitnet: "it's inspired me to think bigger and keeps me focused. I have grown my business knowledge. Killer workshops!"

While participating in the Profitnet programme, George also joined and completed the Help to Grow: Management Course at the University of Brighton to help to boost his leadership skills and business performance. Following his successful completion of Help to Grow, George is now a business mentor for the next cohort of business leaders and has become an ambassador and champion for the BRITE project and brand.



Michael Kennard, founder of Compost Club, is on a mission to end food waste in Brighton. The company diverts local food waste from landfill or incineration and instead harnesses the nutrients to create a compost full of organisms that give life to the soil. The compost is full of diverse microorganisms that regenerate soil and sequester carbon. Fixing the soil results in healthier food, the ability to grow more pest and disease resistant crops, and the capability to capture carbon from the atmosphere.

Compost Club collects food waste in Brighton and surrounding areas, treats it, and returns it as high-quality compost. If people don't want the compost back, Michael donates it to community gardens, multiplying its benefit to the local community. He keeps the process simple and convenient to encourage people to participate.

Having only ever worked as a sole trader prior to joining BRITE, Michael sought support in operating a young, fast-growing business. He joined the Good Business Club, who are members of Plus X Innovation, and it was there that he learnt about the INSPIRE programme. The framework that INSPIRE provided Michael with taught him the importance of collaboration in business, especially for young start-ups.

Since taking part in the programme, Compost Club has received funding from the Chalk Cliff Trust and managed to crowdfund an impressive £22,000, which was match-funded by LoCASE (Low Carbon Across the South and East). Compost Club has also expanded its reach, opening new sites in Lancing and Greater Dixer. So far, the business has been 40 tonnes carbon negative annually because no fossil fuels are used. Michael also hopes to develop educational services to teach children and adults about the importance of soil, its impact on all life, and that embracing sustainability need not be a complicated process.

COMPOST CLUB

PROGRAMME: INSPIRE

DAD LA SOUL

PROGRAMME: PIONEERS



Award-winning social entrepreneur Dan Flanagan founded *Dad La Soul* in 2016 to create a support network that destigmatises the mental and physical challenges that come with being a father. The business addresses an area that is majorly underfunded, is an important social issue and helps to provide an environment for fathers to talk about their problems, with a view to creating a more emotionally engaged generation who have positive male role models in their lives. Since its inception, *Dad La Soul* has become a community of thousands from over eight different countries.

Dan joined the final Pioneers cohort in 2023 to progress academic validation and research with the University of Brighton for the social impact work he has been conducting with Skills Improvement, the policy change think tank and the Fatherhood Institute. As a result of the programme, Dan connected with the University of Brighton and has established an exciting partnership with them.

Dan benefitted massively from the sense of community he felt whilst on Pioneers. Having found the experience of being a founder to be lonely at times, the programme showed Dan the importance of different points of view and extended networks. As a result, Dan is establishing a bigger ecosystem of networks both locally and nationally.

After meeting Sam Zindel, Managing Director of *Propellernet*, on the programme, the two have been developing a partnership together. As well as collaborating on B Corp applications based around seeking growth and community engagement, *Propellernet* will be hosting *Dad La Soul's* Brighton networking meetups, which includes new members from the Pioneers cohort.

Dan is planning on taking the teachings he received from *OLIO* to extend his community reach using innovative technology and applying it to the *Dad La Soul* business model. This has the potential to establish an entirely new way of thinking within the business and will develop existing relationships across the globe.





BRITE project team -
Plus X Innovation and
University of Brighton

“Businesses will always need support to improve growth, innovation, resilience, and productivity. BRITE has engaged with businesses for over three years, gathered feedback, iterated programme offerings and improved [...]. There is space for BRITE in other parts of the country where private sector/HE collaboration is weak.”

ANDY POWELL, PROJECT DIRECTOR, THE INSIGHT WORKS



THE FUTURE IS BRITE

BRITE is a success story in innovation, collaboration, partnership, and unparalleled business support. The project not only exceeded a number of performance metrics stipulated by its funder, but it has created a living, thriving innovation ecosystem in a disadvantaged part of the UK that will continue long into the future.

Satisfaction amongst BRITE's SME beneficiaries has been consistently high, producing the outstanding results you see here, as well as wider, qualitative impacts that have been felt in Greater Brighton and beyond.

Of all the partnerships and collaborations facilitated by the project, the unique partnership between Plus X Innovation and the University of Brighton has proven to be the most remarkable. The combination of robust academic expertise, real world entrepreneurial experience, agile business processes,

established business innovation programmes, a cutting edge innovation space and a resident business community has been the foundation upon which all other activity has been built. Project partners will continue to work together, building on and adapting their programmes of support for business as well as opening doors to other new and exciting possibilities.

We want to thank all those involved in the BRITE project, from the SME end beneficiaries, to the experts and innovators who participated in or supported our programmes. A final thanks goes to the European Regional Development Fund for its generous funding and to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for its administration, without which the BRITE project – and all its attendant and enduring benefits – wouldn't have been possible.



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About BRITE

BRITE (Brighton Research Innovation Technology Exchange) has been co-designed by Plus X Innovation, in partnership with the University of Brighton, to support leaders of companies that have ambitions to grow and scale their business through innovation and collaboration and is receiving up to £5m of funding from the England European Regional Development Fund. You can find out more at BRITEinnovation.co.uk

