

Edinburgh Business School Incubator, Report July 2018-December 2021

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Executive summary

On July 9th 2018 the *EBS Incubator* was opened at Heriot-Watt's Edinburgh campus. Its aim was to create a diverse community of new start firms and provide them with support to help them take their business ideas and ambitions to the next stage. After our third year, we are delighted to report the following summary results.

Businesses assisted 2018-2021¹:	Total: 46
Jobs created:	72*
Grants and prizes	£1,398,150*
Private investment:	£445,000*
Patents:	4 awarded, 7 pending*
Sales (13 firms):	£1,864,521[†]

* Total responses = 29 and refers to during their time in the incubator
[†] Sales of 13/29 firms who were trading during their time in the incubator

The EBS Incubator is a flexible provision for firms at a variety of stages of start-up, from proof of concept through to early trading. In the incubator, firms experience a free and safe harbour in which they can develop, initially for 12 months, though there is an option to apply for a further 12 months too.

The philosophy of the incubator is research-informed and follows the general 'melting pot' principle: that diversity is useful and important for learning. As such, an inclusive approach encourages firms of all types to apply. We thus have an incubator community where there is no one 'type' of start-up or starter, instead there is a wide range of businesses, and amongst participants, a wide range of ages, backgrounds and knowledge, and this diversity informs tacit and explicit peer to peer learning. Alongside this, incubees receive individual expert counselling and a programme of seminars and training on all things start-up, from intellectual property to social marketing. This programme is delivered by a mixture of industry and commercial experts and specialists in Edinburgh Business School. Industry-specific mentoring is also available if requested. The counselling and EBS programme are delivered and managed by our associates at the enterprise support firm, *Unpreneur*, founded by our own Heriot-Watt graduate Kallum Russell. Along with the guys at Unpreneur, each presenter, mentor and

¹ Thanks to Sam Trett and Rehab Ahmed for help with data capture and collation

incubee has made invaluable contribution and we are grateful for their efforts during this first three years, including and especially during the pandemic.

An extraordinary three years

Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt has been delivering world-class education to adult learners for decades. The EBS Incubator was the realisation of an ambition to complement this with real-life support for aspiring entrepreneurs. The incubator was started in 2018 with an initial nine firms who contributed to the co-creation of the offering that has evolved over this initial three years.

Since the original nine firms, a total of 46 businesses been received support from incubator, some for short period, others for the full 12 month programme, and some who have stayed longer. The Incubator does offer a renewal option after the initial 12 months and some participants have taken that up. The start of the UK lock-downs in March 2020 in response to the Covid 19 pandemic led to further extensions for several too – as we made crystal clear at the time: no firm was compelled to leave during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 years

The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns have had an enormous effect on incubator activities and on the start-ups in the incubator. Lockdowns that started in March 2020 led to us becoming (temporarily) a virtual incubator. The pandemic also prompted us to provide additional sessions on pivoting and resilience for our firms. A further response to the pandemic was the decision to support our Heriot-Watt graduates. To that end, we created a new intake for January 2021 exclusively for graduates of the University. This recruited seven start-ups, all of whom are still in the incubator and whose results are collated in the data reported. Despite the extraordinary circumstances, the incubator results illustrate the quality of the businesses we support and our commitment to continuing that.

Progress

Throughout our first three years, we have incubated start-ups in a wide variety of sectors, following our 'melting pot' philosophy of inclusivity and diversity from which everyone can learn.

- Firms are in industries ranging from signals, energy, electronics, geoscience, trades, retail, service-based social enterprises, hospitality and more.
- Our incubees come from Scotland, elsewhere in the UK, and we have attracted several from overseas, some of whom we have sponsored on a start-up visa, with support from Heriot-Watt's visa office.
- Incubees may or may not have gone to Heriot-Watt and we have representation of graduates from several universities and people who are not graduates at all.
- Of our Heriot-Watt alumni, we have had graduates of every school, including *Edinburgh Business School, School of Social Sciences, Engineering and Physical Science, School of Textiles and Design, and Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society.*

Outcomes

Patents

Amongst our technology-based firms, several patents have been applied for with to date 11 patents pending and four granted. This reflects our commitment to supporting technology innovation.

Competitions and Awards

With regard to competitions and awards, there have been good outcomes for both technology and non-technology firms. These successes are reflected in good representation in the local and wider support and awards ecosystem and awards from industry specific bodies and from more general prestigious sources.

Achievements: awards and finalists
Barclays Small Business Initiative
Converge
European Innovation and Technology Awards
Kickstarter
Made in Scotland Awards
Royal Bank of Scotland
Royal Society of Edinburgh
Royal Academy of Engineering
Santander University Entrepreneurship Awards
Scottish Edge
Scottish Institute for Enterprise
Unlocking Ambition 2020
WeDo Scotland

Investment, awards and grants

In total, £1,843,150 has been invested in firms while they were resident in the incubator, £445,000 of which was private investment, and £1,398,150 of which was awards and grant funding. Of these latter, sources range widely, illustrating the reach and diversity of the incubated firms and the wider network of the EBS Incubator.

Sales

Thirteen of the 29 responding firms were at early trading stage while in the incubator. Collated sales of them all during their stays amounts to £1,864,521

Press

Many of our incubees we have been positively and extensively profiled in press and media, locally in Edinburgh, nationally in Scotland and the UK, and internationally. These include magazine, newspaper, radio and TV coverage.

What's included?

Incubated firms are able to access all the support and enterprise development activities in EBS and Heriot-Watt, throughout the Scottish Universities network and the broader support community. They also receive access to role models, training and workshops, and have the opportunity to work with a mentor.

EBS Incubator provision

- Free work station, internet access, telephone, photocopying, printing, etc
- Seminar series
- Breakout spaces, including meeting rooms of various sizes
- Access to a community of Heriot-Watt based entrepreneurs and extended networks
- Links to EBS entrepreneurship and personal development training and events
- Links to Heriot-Watt enterprise events and support
- Links to external competitions and support
- Tailored support and training as appropriate
- Mentoring
- Support for visas if required

The seminar series

Training seminars occur fortnightly. Some are pre-scheduled, but there is flexibility built in so that they can be responsive to incubee demand and needs.

Broadly, training seminars include access to business specialists in EBS and relevant specialists in specific areas from the commercial world, including business services specialists and established entrepreneurs.

Edinburgh Business School Expert Seminars	
Topic	Speaker
Induction	Kallum Russell, Laura Galloway
Entrepreneurial Mindset	Kallum Russell
Building Social Capital	Professor Heather McGregor
Marketing Reborn!	Kallum Russell
Negotiations Skills	Robert Hartnett
Leadership	Professor Laura Galloway
Knowing Your Numbers	Colin Garvie
Managing Cash Flow & Valuing your Company	Dr Abdulkader Mostafa

Learning to Grow	Professor Umit Bititci
Entrepreneurial wellbeing	Laura Jackman
<i>Pivoting your business in a crisis</i>	<i>Laura Galloway, Kallum Russell</i>
<i>Resilience and response to crisis</i>	<i>Laura Galloway, Kallum Russell</i>

External Expert Seminars		
Topic	Speaker	Organization
Legal Issues in the Startup Context	Alistair Lang	Thornton's Law
Negotiation and goal setting	Sam Trett	Loca Beverages
Marketing Reborn!	Kallum Russell	Unpreneur
Time Management and Productivity	Brian Macauley	PIN Training
Finding Your Energy	Stuart Rogan	Future Positive Consulting
My Story So Far...	Allison Harrison	Hot Yoga Edinburgh
Your Brand Definition	Charlotte Halliday	Noble Ox
Tender, Bid Writing & Grant Application Success	Andrew Morrison	AM BID
An Honest Conversation with...	Andy Robinson	Deliveroo Edinburgh
Storytelling Pitching & Presentation	Bob Keiller	Wood Group