

Entrepreneurship

at the School of Business and Management, QMUL

We asked some of our current students and alumni to share their stories of pursuing their business ambitions while at the School of Business and Management:

Zahir Misbah

BSc Business Management, class of 2017

QMUL's location is second-to-none when it comes to entrepreneurial activity in London. The Mile End campus sits a mile from Tech City in Shoreditch, Old Street and Farringdon, the Fintech clusters in Canary Wharf and the new innovation complex – Plexal – at Here East.

What's amazing about the start-up community in London, is that it's very approachable and incredibly diverse from both a sector focus and human talent perspective. Once you understand how to navigate it, you'll be surprised how quickly things can happen. Doing your research before approaching any company or individual will instantly put you on the right path as you'll gain a surprising amount of good will and credibility from founders or executives, if:

You have an understanding of their industry and how the landscape is evolving. One of your greatest advantages at this stage is your age. The scene thrives on continuously having a fresh perspective. Being able to see how technology is shaping the world and the trends that are emerging. Realise, you have a fresh pair of eyes, untainted by experience. In other words, be yourself.

You try to get an insight into the culture of a place - a great talking point. This will help you to succinctly and precisely **communicate how you can add value** to their organisation or perhaps, on a personal level with them.

You can demonstrate a 'growth mindset' – i.e. the willingness and humility to constantly learn from others and failure, and the ability to quickly adapt to constant change.

You can demonstrate initiative - it shows you can make things happen!

Having said all of the above, **don't overthink it**. Get out there, pop up at events. Use your location to your advantage. Have fun and chat to lots of people. If you say you'll follow up on something, make sure you do. Start building your network from day one, full of high quality relationships and further down the line (whether that's tomorrow or in a year) things will naturally fall into place.



Alex Fernandez

BSc Business Management, class of 2019

The idea of Veganook's came up during my first year. As many students do from time to time, one very lazy night I decided to order food to my room. Being a vegan, I found the process quite difficult, since there was not an on-demand food delivery app that could ensure a no-egg, no-dairy and no-honey meal. Seeing the recent explosion of the vegan and vegetarian food scene in London made me think about the unmet market that food delivery for people like me represented. Even though I did not have a strong background on how to start up a company, I decided to give it a try.

My main idea was to satisfy vegan and vegetarian consumers who could not enjoy (and trust) a food delivery platform. Therefore, the aim was to only deliver vegan and vegetarian food, giving the customer full information about what they were going to order online. Later on, we thought that, in addition to restaurants, adding grocery stores to the platform would be a great opportunity to reach a wider range of customers.

Of course, this was not as easy as it sounds; I first had to pitch my idea and gain buy in for initial investment. After that, we worked for months on design, coding, creating a brand image, finding a way to deliver our orders without losing tons of money and finding our customers (both restaurants and users) in Barcelona – my hometown, where Veganook's would start off its operations.

In October 2017, we delivered our first order. Our website went live in January this year. Three months later, we had delivered 160 orders, 100 of these delivered in March. In that time, more than 500 users registered on our website. Our next goal is to establish our operations in Barcelona and, before the start of the summer, expand our service to Madrid, Spain. London will be our next stop after that.

<https://veganooks.com/>

Alvaro Lobato

BSc Business Management, class of 2017

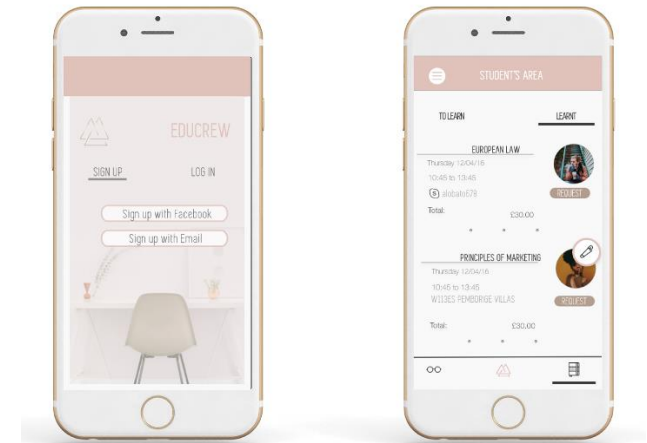
My idea is an online peer-to-peer tutoring marketplace, delivered through an app. In early 2017, I formed a team of three programmers and a business developer from CASS Business School. We developed a prototype and launched in April 2017, testing it at CASS, helping more than 120 students. After this time, we realized that what our clients really wanted was to take tutoring sessions in groups (so they become cheaper) and online (so they didn't need to be at uni at the time of the session).

As soon as I finished my final exams, I joined a coding boot-camp called Le Wagon.

“I spent my graduation summer learning to code, which was a life-changing experience.”

During the last two weeks of the boot-camp, students form teams and code the most voted for projects. My project proposal - a group peer-to-peer tutoring platform where sessions took place in group video chats - was selected and I formed a team of three to code a prototype, which we then presented at Google Campus.

People loved it and I met several angel investors interested in the idea.



Now, my team and I are improving the platform and trying to learn from customers as much as possible by running a closed beta system. So far, for this trial period, we have signed up over one hundred students and three tutors. I am also applying for funding to continue product development, through schemes such as the Enterprise Awards at QMUL. We aim to continue with the beta testing during this exam period and finally launch this September, once we have figured out how to scale our product. As part of the scaling process we have just moved from a pay-per-session to a subscription business model.

<https://www.educrew.io/>

Anmol Bajwa

BSc Business Management, class of 2019

My father has worked for many years in the shipping industry and the idea for BitNautic was born out of my conversations with him about the bureaucratic and logistical challenges he regularly encounters in his work. BitNautic is a decentralized shipping and cargo platform based on block-chain technology, which acts as a marketplace for goods and commodities where importers, exporters, end consumers and producers are available to trade their products and ease their trading practices all over the globe. The idea is to use technology to streamline the shipping process, simplifying administration without compromising security.



The platform comes with distinctive features like an Artificial Intelligence-based booking system, real-time tracking of ships, an e-commerce platform, and the introduction of a digital currency (BitNautic Token or BTNT), that will be used to buy and sell services on the platform. It deploys block-chain technology along with smart contracts to support fast, secure and transparent transactions.

One of the hardest challenges I had to face in getting my idea off the ground was finding the right people, who understand block-chain and how to apply such cutting-edge technologies as the ones used in our product. I had to spend a great deal on LinkedIn to finally identify and connect with people who had the necessary expertise. As we are based in Switzerland, I have also had to quickly learn the policy frameworks the Swiss government has introduced to regulate cryptocurrency trading and ICOs, to ensure that we operate within the law.

Now we are at an exciting point in the

“The cost of developing my idea has been my social life – I have had to devote virtually all of my free time to it, but it has been worth it.”

development of our product – we are very close to the start of the Pre-ICO (May 1st), that will generate initial investment, and we are moving towards the Initial Coin Offering (ICO), which will be our main investment vehicle for further product development and for the next marketing phase.

<https://bitnautic.io/>

Lena Pastor

BSc Business Management, class of 2016

I joined Deloitte to work on Fintech projects, where we mostly foster collaboration between corporates and start-ups. I work in the Strategy & Operations department, focusing on financial services. Our small Fintech team is in charge of growing the Deloitte innovation hub in Paris, and my responsibility is to develop our open innovation tools as well as our ecosystem.

“Our challenge is to digitalize clients and ourselves, which is no easy task.”

I am responsible for an EMEA programme called Upside, which we created in collaboration with 500 Startups, a global start-up accelerator and venture capital firm. My responsibilities include managing the relationship with my 500 Startups colleagues in San Francisco and my Deloitte UK colleagues. When a corporate and a start-up are collaborating on a programme, I act as a Project Manager and single point of contact – making sure everyone is doing their job on their side, advising both sides if needed, helping them to streamline legal and compliance processes,

organising each checkpoint; essentially I ensure that the proof of concept runs smoothly.

Hand in hand with the Partner, I work on the marketing of our programme, which includes pitching to clients, organising conferences, going to conferences to pitch our programme. I am also responsible for the Department's start-up scouting; when a customer needs a start-up to solve a specific business challenge, I am in charge of finding the perfect match, using venture capital techniques.

<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/innovation/topics/fintech.html>

<https://500.co/>

Ed Melikyan, Mariia Rogova

BSc Business Management, class of 2019

We founded the Business and Enterprise Society in September 2017, with the aim of providing a network node for QMUL students interested in entrepreneurship and the start-up process, with a focus on Fintech this year. We connect students with company founders at successful start-ups, such as Atom Bank (which just raised £350m in venture capital) and senior executives at established organisations with an interest in innovation, such as Microsoft and KPMG.

We've learned that senior executives are looking to generate long-term positive impact for their organisations and they see engaging with interested students as key to this – the starting point for successful recruitment in the long term. For us, we want to create lasting value for our members by helping them to begin to plan and prepare for their future careers through our activities. This in turn helps us to develop a strong brand image for the society, enabling us to attract more influential speakers and organisations to work with us.



The society has hosted over twenty events this year, including guest talks and networking sessions. We have also run three coding workshops and a number of conceptual events, which explored issues around AI, data analytics and the UK Fintech ecosystem. We are really proud of the reach our events have had, both within QMUL and further afield, attracting

students from other universities and professionals from the tech and finance sectors, which are located nearby.



Companies look to recruit people with a strong sense of commercial awareness, good technical knowledge and entrepreneurial ambition – they are looking for people who want to drive their organisations forward, who understands their respective sector and are looking for opportunities to deliver innovative and positive outcomes.

“We encourage our members not only to attend talks, but to use them to create contacts at organisations they might want to work for in the future.”

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/queen-mary-business-and-enterprise-society/>

How has your degree helped?

Alvaro: It has enabled me to visualise the entrepreneurial process from the start, from forming a team to developing a product and signing up the first customers. It also allowed me to prioritise certain aspects of the business, differentiating between what matters and what doesn't. My business knowledge combined with my coding skills acquired during this last year make me a sought after employee in any start up, but most importantly it allows me to give form to my creative ideas.

“my degree allows me to give form to my creative ideas.”

Léna: Throughout my BSc and MSc I have acquired great project management, organization and communication skills, which are essential to my day to day work. For example, when I lead Proofs of Concepts between corporates and start-ups, I use project management software and techniques learned during my studies. When I go and pitch our services to clients, I use all of the communication skills acquired from giving presentations at uni to present with conviction and confidence. As my job is heavily focused on innovation and technology, I have to continue to educate myself

to keep up to date with new developments in the sector.

Anmol: The research skills I have developed during my studies have been invaluable for doing the groundwork to get Bitnautics off the ground. Furthermore, improving my academic writing skills really helped to write the white paper – the key communication to attract investors. I felt confident presenting my initial draft of the paper to my business partners and have continued to refine it since.

“Networks are critical in all career routes, but especially so in the start-up field.”

Ed: I set up my LinkedIn account around the same time as the society and now have over 2,000 contacts across the world, from friends, classmates, alumni, entrepreneurs and Senior Executives at multinational corporations. Running the society has helped me to develop my confidence and interpersonal skills as well as refined my ability to network effectively. I can see the value of this now – I have gained a good reputation in the eyes of influential professionals, which I hope to use to good effect after I graduate and begin my career. We want to share this knowledge with our members and

will be running ‘what is networking?’ and ‘how to network’ sessions over the next academic year.

Alex: My degree has been helpful throughout the start-up process from a variety of perspectives, from learning different persuasive marketing techniques in order to sell our service to a restaurant owner who might not trust a young student, to creating a brand image that will attract users to your platform. However, the most helpful part of studying at QMUL has been the people from all over the world that I have met in my first two years. They have helped me open my mind and given me their time and opinions, and their support has motivated me to work hard to get Veganook’s off the ground.

“The people I have met at QMUL have helped me to open my mind... their support has motivated me to get Veganook’s off the ground.”

Zahir: There are so many opportunities to explore, so be proactive, be entrepreneurial and make the most of your location.