FOUNDERS /START 2.0
At the University of Cambridge

LOOKBOOK 2025

Delivered by

WELCOME

At Founders at the University of Cambridge, we believe that the most ambitious ideas deserve the strongest foundations.

We equip founders for growth through capital investment, multi-stage accelerator programs, intensive mentoring, and access to a global network of experts across technology, business, and academia.

This holistic support empowers them to transform bold ideas into high-impact ventures.

START is one of our flagship programmes - a pre-seed accelerator designed to accelerate the journey of existing ventures.

This booklet introduces you to the remarkable founders in our latest cohort, **START 2.0**, a diverse group of innovators tackling some of the world's most pressing challenges, from AI and deep tech to life sciences.

Over the course of the programme they hone their research and ideas, engage with expert mentors, customers, and entrepreneurs/operators-in-residence, and take critical steps toward becoming investment-ready.

We invite you to explore their stories, their startups, and their vision. This is where innovation meets action.

Welcome to Founders at the University of Cambridge.

WINNY SANCHITA
Senior Associate,
Founders at The University of Cambridge

ACCELERATING BRILLIANCE

Founders at the University of Cambridge empowers entrepreneurial minds at the University of Cambridge with expertise, capital and community so they can thrive and have a global impact.

FOUNDERS.CAM.AC.UK
You can also follow progress on LinkedIn at @founders-at-the-university-of-cambridge

"We're thrilled to see the next generation of our inaugural programme, START, take shape. The founders in this cohort are trailblazers in AI, Sustainability, Life Sciences, Hardware, and BioTech, and join Founders at the University of Cambridge's growing alumni base of science and technology-led companies who are solving some of the world's greatest challenges."

MARK LAZAR
Programme Director,
Founders at The University of Cambridge

CAMBRIDGE ADAPTIVE TESTING

Cambridge Adaptive Testing

Cambridge Adaptive Testing develops rapid, simple and precise mental health measurement using innovative technologies.

We provide innovative age-specific platforms for efficient, mental health assessment to identify who needs support for their mental health and to evaluate the effectiveness of individual and organisational-level interventions. We apply adaptive testing technology making our assessments quick, precise, efficient, personalised and engaging, with high acceptability of repeated measurements.

Our platforms are bundled together with a dashboard allowing organisational clients to easily distribute assessments, monitor data collection, and create bespoke reports, for individuals, managers and boards.

Professor Peter Brian Jones **CMO**

Peter is Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus at the University of Cambridge and an honorary consultant psychiatrist with the NHS. An epidemiologist, he is a Clarivate Analytics highly-cited researcher with experience of board-level management in the university, health and charity sectors.

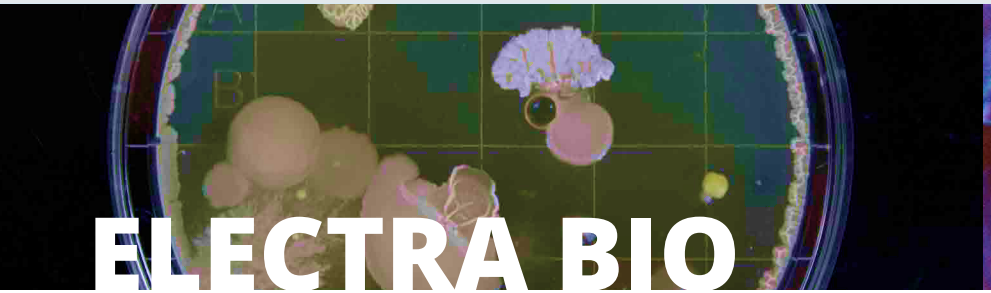
CO-FOUNDERS

Alison Howie **CEO**

Alison has 30 years' experience in MedTech, holding leadership roles in commercial and R&D functions for a major multi-national business and C-suite roles in early-stage companies. As a consultant, she has recently supported several healthcare innovators to optimise product and market strategies and implement commercialisation plans.

Jan Stochl **CTO**

Jan is a psychometrician and statistician with expertise in latent variable modelling, graph networks, and computerised adaptive testing. He is Senior Research Associate, University of Cambridge and Honorary Professor of Psychometrics at Charles University, Prague. Jan applies novel psychometric methods in neuropsychiatry to improve assessment and patient reported outcomes.



ELECTRA BIO

GASTROBODY THERAPEUTICS

electra

Electra Bio is building bioelectronic lab-grown organs, making drug discovery smarter and faster.

Complex, three-dimensional tissue cultures have been identified as a solution to the inefficiency crisis at the heart of drug discovery; with organ-on-chip models shown to be capable of screening out ineffective drug assets before they incur significant costs. However, extracting the data needed to realise this potential has proven intractable. Until we solved it.

We have built a system which blends biology and sensor to create living electronics, accelerating the journey from concept to cure, opening the way for data rich experimentation and the data-driven future of drug discovery.

Dr Douglas C. Van Niekerk
CO-FOUNDER

Douglas holds a PhD in bioelectronics and a Masters in sensors from the University of Cambridge, as well as undergraduate degrees in electronics and biomedical engineering. Having developed our core technology, he is a passionate interdisciplinarian who loves to learn, invent and build.

CO-FOUNDERS

Dr Reece McCoy
CTO

Reece completed his PhD thesis in Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology and Masters in the Physics department at Cambridge. Continuing as a researcher on bioelectronic tissue models, he brings valuable experience in health-tech consulting and advanced materials policy to advance next-gen platforms for diagnostics, drug discovery, and disease modelling.

Professor Roisin M Owen **CSO**

Roisin is a Professor of Bioelectronics at the University of Cambridge who studies the integration of electronic devices with biological systems. She currently serves as the deputy Head of the School of Technology and has over 130 publications and 11,000 citations. Roisin has also been the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the 2024 Biochemical Society AstraZeneca Award.

Gastrobody Therapeutics

Gastrobody Therapeutics is developing ultra-stable antibody mimetics capable of withstanding the harsh acidic and protease-rich conditions of the GI tract.

We aim to use our patented gastrobody platform to develop orally-administered biologics to transform the way we treat GI tract diseases such as Crohn's disease and Ulcerative Colitis.

The Gastrobody platform combines the exquisite specificity of antibodies with the stability of certain soybean proteins to generate a novel class of biologics which can be delivered directly to the GI tract rather than the systemic administration by injection which is used for existing antibody-based therapies.

Dr Ana Rossi
CSO

Ana Rossi completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge and currently works at the Department of Pharmacology where she applies her expertise in protein engineering to advance the Gastrobody platform She has held numerous prestigious fellowships and grants and is currently a Fellow at Queen's College, Cambridge.

CO-FOUNDERS

Yasunori Watanabe
CEO

Yasunori Watanabe holds a DPhil in Biochemistry from the University of Oxford. He is passionate about developing novel therapeutic platforms and translating scientific concepts into real world applications. He has previously worked at AstraZeneca and Sanofi working on projects spanning from early-stage candidates to clinical-phase drugs.

Professor Mark Howarth **ADVISOR**

Mark Howarth is the Sheild Chair in the University of Cambridge Department of Pharmacology. He co-founded the company SpyBiotech and has been awarded the Royal Society of Chemistry Norman Heatley Award. His group focusses on innovating protein technologies including bacterial superglues, NeissLock, and Gastrobodies.

PINEPEAK

Pinepeak

Pinepeak develops physics-driven technology to predict wildfire risk and behaviour across any terrain, anywhere in the world.

By providing ultra-high-resolution forecasts and analytics at the individual asset level, Pinepeak aims to enhance re/insurance coverage, strengthen community climate resilience, and empower emergency responders in the fight against wildfires—helping protect lives and the environment.

CO-FOUNDERS

Dr Savvas Gkantonas
CEO

Savvas is a fire modelling expert with a PhD from the University of Cambridge. He co-founded two previous startups, developed predictive tools for industry leaders such as Rolls-Royce and Siemens, and created the Airborne.cam app, which has reached 120,000 users.

Dr Daniel Fredrich
CO-FOUNDER

Daniel is an accomplished computational engineer with a PhD from Imperial College London. Before co-founding Pinepeak, he conducted research in fluid dynamics at the University of Cambridge and worked with world-renowned engineering companies across the aerospace, automotive, and energy sectors.

PRODROMIC

Prodromic

Prodromic makes brain health more intelligent so new treatments are developed faster and each person gets the right intervention at the right time.

Our multimodal AI engines use routine clinical data to separate “indistinguishable” patients at early dementia stages and predict disease trajectories over 5 years. Validated across diverse, international data sets, we have shown 3x sensitivity vs. standard of care, and rescued a “failed” Phase 3 trial in collaboration with a major pharmaceutical company.

Our SaaS solution accelerates new treatments: making clinical trials cheaper, faster and more effective. Through personalised predictions, we strengthen in market treatments, enhancing effectiveness and balancing side effect risks.

CO-FOUNDERS

Dr Andrew Welchman CEO

Andrew is a neuroscientist, strategist and entrepreneur with a background in academia (Professor of Neural Intelligence at Cambridge), research investment (led Neuroscience and Mental health at Wellcome) and scalable, AI-driven health tech (Executive at ieso Digital Health).

Professor Zoe Kourtzi
CSO

Zoe is a Royal Society Industry Fellow, Cambridge Lead at the Alan Turing Institute and Co-director of Cambridge’s Centre for Data Driven Discovery. Her work sits at the interface between AI, brain imaging and cognition, developing predictive models of brain and mental health for early diagnosis and personalised interventions.

SQWISH

Sqwish is building a smart performance layer between AI apps and model providers, so developers get the best results without the overhead.

Sqwish, founded by Dr Ushnish Sengupta and Federica Freddi, is building a smart performance layer that sits between AI applications and model or compute providers - dynamically optimising performance, speed, cost, and reliability at scale: without the headache.

Scaling AI apps today often means battling rising costs, unpredictable latency, and inconsistent performance - forcing developers into a constant juggling act to deliver seamless user experiences. Sqwish's real-time input optimisation API (their first offering) improves AI output quality, while also cutting down on costs and speed. For long inputs, this means reducing costs up to 10x, with 2x faster responses and 14% improved output accuracy.

CO-FOUNDERS

Dr Ushnish Sengupta
CEO

Ushnish is Founder and CEO of Sqwish. He holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge, applying AI to engineering problems like rocket engine instabilities. Previously at MediaTek Research, he improved generative AI algorithms for image generation and foundation models for wireless communication. He has published extensively in NeurIPS and leading AI venues.

Federica Freddi
CTO

Federica is Founder and CTO of Sqwish. She holds an MEng from the University of Cambridge, and developed her expertise in model pruning, retrieval-augmented generation, and meta-learning. Previously at MediaTek Research, she co-authored the FishLeg optimiser. She also held roles at ARM and Bending Spoons, balancing deeptech with practical engineering.

TRISMIK

Trismik is a pioneering company dedicated to revolutionising the field of Large Language Model (LLM) testing.

Our mission is to establish the gold standard in LLM evaluation by providing an adversarial testing platform that ensures model accuracy, safety, and alignment with societal values.

Through efficient and cost-effective testing, we aim to empower AI professionals to build trustworthy applications, enabling faster deployments and mitigating risks such as hallucinations and misalignment. Our vision is to create a future where AI contributes positively to human well-being.

CO-FOUNDERS

Rebekka Mikkola
CEO

Rebekka is the CEO and Co-Founder of Trismik. An experienced entrepreneur and enterprise software sales expert, she worked at Salesforce and earned the Achievers Club Award for top performance. Her previous startup was featured on Sky News, The Guardian, GQ Magazine, and TEDx.

Professor Nigel Collier
CHIEF SCIENTIST

Nigel is the Chief Scientist and Co-Founder of Trismik. A Professor of Natural Language Processing at the University of Cambridge, he has over 30 years' experience in AI. He was awarded Fellowships from the Alan Turing Institute, EPSRC, JST, as well as other accolades.

OUR PARTNERS

Sponsor Partners

AstraZeneca

AstraZeneca brings deep industry knowledge and a commitment to encouraging innovation in life sciences and helping the next generation of entrepreneurs.

HITACHI
Inspire the Next

Known for their cutting-edge research in the technology space, Hitachi is an essential partner on our journey.

KPMG

With a legacy of excellence in financial and legal services, KPMG adds a wealth of experience to our community, alongside a vast global client network.

Investment Partners

CAMBRIDGE | Enterprise Ventures

Cambridge Enterprise Ventures invests University of Cambridge capital into high impact, high growth Cambridge spin-outs and start-ups, enabling the entrepreneurial academics, students, graduates, and recent alumni from Cambridge to grow by providing early-stage equity investment and support.

Parkwalk
Investing in Innovation

Parkwalk is the UK's most active investor in the UK university spin-out sector and has been supporting University of Cambridge spin-outs since 2012.