



Centre
for Growth



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

ENTERPRISE

Thursday 21st March 2024
The Eastside Rooms, Birmingham



NatWest

Minerva Birmingham Pitch Up is a partnership between:

- **Minerva Business Angels, part of University of Warwick Science Park**
- **University of Birmingham Enterprise and**
- **Aston Centre for Growth, Aston University.**



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Minerva Birmingham Pitch Up 2024 is sponsored by:



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DISCLAIMER

Minerva Birmingham Pitch Up is a pitching competition only.

An authorised person has not approved any of the company's presentations within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. Reliance on their pitches for the purpose of engaging in any investment activity may expose an individual to a significant risk of losing all of the property or other assets invested and you should always seek independent financial advice.

For further information on the risks of investing, please visit <https://www.fca.org.uk/investsmart>

No liability is accepted by the organisers for any statements made by any of the contestants.

Minerva Birmingham Pitch Up 2024



Over the last few months the Pitch Up team have been busy identifying and helping businesses in the region who are seeking funding. Around 60 companies, in a variety of sectors and stages, have been given the opportunity to learn about what attracts investors, and to refine their own pitching skills. The companies in our exhibition area have each been through our investor-driven feedback and selection processes.

From these businesses, the investors' top eight companies have each been asked to present at today's Pitch Up heats. Over the course of the day our judging panel of investors will review these top eight pitches and score them. You can watch these competitions in the Ashtead Suite (1st floor of Eastside Rooms).

In between the heats and the final we have invited some past participants to come and join a panel session; *Where are they now? Take inspiration from those who have done it before.* This panel session is in the Ashtead Suite at 12:10.

This afternoon, at 15:00 in the main room (Belmont 1-2), as well as celebrating all of our finalists, we will be announcing the final three.

But this leaves the question... who is the best? The final three will immediately pitch once more and this time you, the audience, will decide the winner of the *Pitch Up 2024 Best Pitch Award*, £2,000 cash prize and access to Minerva Business Angels. The runner up will get £1,000 cash prize. To help you make your decision, we'll have another fantastic panel of investment specialists on stage ready to ask some searching questions.

HEAT 1 ~ 9:50 - 10:40 ~ Ashtead Suite

Companies Pitching

Bendi software

Contact: Mandeep Soor
Telephone: +44 7810 835 944
Email hello@bendi.ai
Website www.bendi.ai
Amount raising: £500k



Bendi AI radically reduces the risk of human rights, environmental and governance risks in supply chains through 24/7 risk monitoring. Our software maps millions of data points from news, legal cases and social media in multiple languages globally. We work with a wide range of sectors including fashion and textiles, retail and advanced manufacturing.

Cytecom

Contact: Dr Magdelana Karlikowska
E-mail: M.Karlikowska@cytecom.co.uk
Telephone: 07776336146
Website: www.cytecom.co.uk
Amount raising: £1m



Cytecom is tackling a pressing issue in healthcare: the slow and ineffective diagnosis of antibiotic-resistant infections. With a market size exceeding \$3.5 billion globally, our rapid diagnostic test addresses the urgent need for faster detection, saving lives in the process. Our solution, powered by cutting-edge optical electrophysiology, detects resistant bacteria in just 45 seconds, enabling doctors to prescribe targeted antibiotics 48 times faster. Our dedicated team of experts in microbiology, optics, and engineering is committed to revolutionizing diagnostic microbiology and improving patient outcomes worldwide.

Little Birdie

Contact: Martin Bould and Jeremy Taylor
E-mail: martin.bould@littlebirdie.co.uk or jeremy.taylor@littlebirdie.co.uk
Telephone: —
Website: www.littlebirdie.co.uk
Amount raising: £300k



Little Birdie is a subscription & bill management platform, designed to save users time & money. The app, which is free to download and use, takes regular audits of users' subscriptions and regular payments in real-time through open banking.

It then enables users to cancel subscriptions, it reminds them when payments are due, when a free trial is coming to an end and when there is a price rise. Little Birdie also comprises a marketplace for other subscription products including free trials.

Little Birdie for Business is soon to launch and will provide all functionality via a single API to Enterprise clients as 'platform as a service'.

Visionary Farms

Contact: Elena Boos
Telephone: +44 7940 193 792
E-mail: elena@visionaryfarms.com
Website: www.visionaryfarms.com
Amount raising: £1.25m



Visionary Farms is on a mission to make smart growing accessible by providing efficient, simple and user-friendly connected hardware, software and project solutions for indoor and vertical farms. Our full-stack product line is developed in-house and includes tunable grow lighting, automated climate and lighting control, automated hydroponic systems and farm management software. We have a proven track record, having successfully delivered 13 turnkey projects and automated five existing farms.

HEAT 1 ~ 9:50 - 10:40 ~ Ashtead Suite

Panellists



Elizabeth Gooch - Tech Growth Factory

Elizabeth is the award winning founder & former CEO of a UK tech company that invented a software product and pioneered a new technology market. The company was listed on AIM and was acquired by a major US software company in 2017. She now works with Tech StartUps and ScaleUps to help them grow/ scale their businesses and get investment.

Elizabeth was named as one of The Telegraph's 'Most Disruptive Entrepreneurs', West Midlands Woman of the Year for 'Outstanding Contribution to Technology' and she was awarded an MBE for her services to industry in 2012.



Nigel Hall - The Digital Consigliere

Nigel is a current Board Member and Chair of Innovation at Worcestershire LEP. He is also Chair for the UK's award-winning accelerator Betaden and an accomplished Non-Executive Director, Advisor and Mentor to multiple startups & scaleup Founder entrepreneurs and their businesses as well being a Midlands based angel investor.

Nigel has started-up, bought, built & sold a variety of businesses in the Tech, Media, Telco & Digital sector over many years having been part of the founding rollout team at the global mobile company Orange - going onto lead the start-up of all their international units. Nigel excels in guiding Founders and their ventures to get investor-ready, leveraging his own comprehensive background as a former CEO, founder and C suite executive.

His mission is to empower Founders and their teams to create, pivot, scale, and evolve in the competitive global marketplace with a particular focus on supporting underserved and underestimated Founders.



Artem Yaremchuk - Venture Partner at Pragma.tech

Artem Yaremchuk is a serial tech entrepreneur and investor with over 13 years of experience in leadership roles. He co-founded Attendify, a leading B2B event tech SaaS with 2500 clients, which he sold to a UK unicorn in 2021. Currently, he works at Deloitte Ventures in London where he mentors internal teams enabling them to build innovative businesses within Deloitte. He is also a Venture Partner at Pragma.tech, a VC Fund and Startup Studio that invests B2B SaaS and Marketplace on Seed and pre-Seed stages. Artem is an MBA graduate from Warwick Business School.

HEAT 2 ~ 11:10 - 12:00 ~ Ashtead Suite

Companies Pitching

Bueno Europe Ltd

Contact: Felix Hughes
Telephone: +44 7941 568 968
E-mail: felix@getbueno.com
Website: <https://getbueno.com>
Amount raising: £750k

BUENO | PROPERTY
BANKING
SIMPLIFIED

Bueno: Property Banking Simplified, is a massively scalable green FinTech recommended by Currencies Direct.

Bueno creates more time for property owners, buyers and long-term renters to enjoy the Spanish lifestyle - sunshine, the beach, alfresco dining, golf etc.

Bueno achieves this by being a one-stop solution for all your property needs: Banking, Insurance, Currency Exchange, Tax, Home Alarms and Renewable Electricity supported by Top-Rated multi-lingual support.

At getbueno.com you can open an account in less than 10 minutes from anywhere, anytime.

We also partner with conveyancers and estate agents to simplify and significantly speed up completion times.

ESSENCH Health & Beauty

Contact: Christina French
Telephone: +44 121 517 0509 / +447948 437 966
E-mail: info@essench.co.uk
Website: <https://www.essench.co.uk/>
Amount raising: £500k

ESSENCH
HEALTH & BEAUTY

A Multi award winning ethical and sustainable manufacturer providing formulation development, contract services, compliance, and certification to health and beauty brands. Committed to providing natural products, with full ingredient transparency ensuring consumer safety and the environment are always at the forefront of the company's mission.

Gaston AI

Contact: Dr Yogesh Gupta
Telephone: +44 7403512511
Email: yogesh@gogaston.io
Website: <https://gogaston.io>
Amount raising: £1.5 million



GASTON

Gaston AI is a B2B SaaS platform offering biomarker based personalised food recommendations for boosting health and longevity.

We are unlocking healthy living by matching food & nutrient intakes to users' metabolism. Our proprietary AI maps foods' macro, micro & phytonutrients to users' unique biomarkers enabling them to discover and consume the right type & amount of nutrients that help them stay healthy for a longer period of time.

We provide technology integrations via APIs to food technology platforms, health & care providers, insurance providers, private & corporate catering companies, grocery sellers - enabling them to build highly personalised food plans that are aimed at boosting health and longevity.

HEAT 2 ~ 11:10 - 12:00 ~ Ashtead Suite

Companies Pitching

The Matcha Yaad

Contact: Monique Farquharson
Telephone: +447936661906
E-mail: hello@petitsquares.co.uk
Website: thematchayaad.com
Amount raising: £200k



The Matcha Yaad is the UK's first Jamaican Matcha company. We specialise in seamlessly blending the elegance of Japanese Matcha with the bold and spirited flavours of Jamaican cuisine. We offer a range of innovative products with our Ginger Refresher being the star of the show. It's an RTD, canned, and still beverage, perfect for a soft energy boost. We also offer Matcha powder from Uji, Kyoto both flavoured and ceremonial. Additionally, we conduct Matcha workshops where we introduce the matcha tea ceremony which we have mastered after staying almost two years in Japan. Visit our website thematchayaad.com to learn more about our incredible story!

Panellists



Kameese Davis - Nylah's Naturals (2023 Pitch Up Winner)

2023 Pitch Up winner Kameese Davis is the driving force behind Nylah's, a haircare product line dedicated to providing clean, plant-based alternatives for textured hair. Inspired by her daughter's need for high-performance, non-toxic haircare, Kameese founded Nylah's with a strong commitment to natural ingredients, sustainability, and inclusivity, specifically catering to women with textured hair. Since winning the competition, Kameese has raised £530k from Midlands Engine Investment Fund and the West Midlands Co-Investment Fund. Kameese continues to grow her brand, supported many contestants in this years competition and continues to speak about the challenges faced by black entrepreneurs when it comes to raising finance.



Dr. Constantina Katsari - Minerva Business Angel

Dr. Constantina Katsari is a serial entrepreneur in Digital Businesses. Her experience ranges from property tech, SAAS, commercial platforms, social media and others. After many years in the business world, she decided to give back to the entrepreneurs of the future. She is now investing in early stage digital businesses with an emphasis on SAAS. She is also interested in Clean Tech startups and businesses that are out there to make an impact.



Dash Virdee - Minerva Business Angel

Dash is an adept Birmingham-based entrepreneur and angel investor with a diverse portfolio spanning med tech, food, and consumer goods sectors. With a rich history of bolstering SMEs.

Dash excels in making startups investment-ready, assembling robust teams, and providing crucial hands-on support. This strategic assistance allows founders to concentrate on core business aspects, ensuring their ventures' growth and scalability.

Where are they now? Take inspiration from those who have done it before.

12:10 - 13:00 Ashtead Suite

PANEL CHAIR



Paula Whitehouse

**Deputy Dean Enterprise and Engagement, Aston University College of Business and Social Sciences
Director, Aston Centre for Growth**

Paula Whitehouse is Deputy Dean Enterprise and Engagement in the College of Business and Social Sciences at Aston University, and Director of the Aston Centre for Growth where she has developed a portfolio of growth programmes and business support initiatives for entrepreneurs and small business leaders. Paula was awarded the Chancellor's Medal by Aston University in 2021.

Working with the Chartered Association of Business Schools, Paula is Curriculum Director for the UK Government's *Help to Grow: Management* Course delivered throughout the UK by Small Business Charter accredited business schools. She was also Curriculum Director for the government's *Small Business Leadership Programme* which helped 2,800 business leaders build resilience and recovery during the Covid-19 pandemic. Paula chairs accreditation panels for the Small Business Charter and in 2018 gave evidence on behalf of the Small Business Charter to the House of Commons BEIS Committee Small Business and Productivity Inquiry.

As Section Lead and speaker for the Goldman Sachs *10,000 Small Businesses* UK programme Paula has supported hundreds of entrepreneurs through its intensive leadership and management education since 2011. She has also worked with the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women programme in India supporting their curriculum development. Paula is a Fellow of the Chartered Association of Business Schools, a Trustee of Ex Cathedra, a leading UK choir and early music ensemble, a Fellow of the RSA, a member of the West Midlands Co-Investment Fund Advisory Committee and a member of the Help to Grow: Management Alumni Advisory Panel.

PANEL SPEAKERS - PAST PITCH UP PARTICIPANTS



Kameese Davis

Founder of Nylah's Naturals (2023 Pitch Up Winner)

Kam Davis is not only a visionary entrepreneur but also a proud mother of two, skilfully navigating the realms of business and family life with grace and determination. As the CEO and Founder of Nylah's Naturals, a trailblazing vegan haircare brand tailored for Afro-textured and curly hair, Kam has emerged as a formidable force in the beauty and wellness industry.

In 2020, Kam embarked on a mission to revolutionize haircare, dedicating herself to formulating a 100% natural, sustainably sourced haircare solution. Her relentless pursuit of excellence led her to collaborate with cosmetic scientists, trichologists, and traditional herbalists, resulting in a brilliant hair care product that has garnered acclaim and numerous industry accolades.

Despite the challenges of entrepreneurship, Kam has seamlessly blended her role as a proud mother with the demands of running a successful business. Her ability to balance the intricacies of motherhood while steering Nylah's Naturals to widespread recognition and availability in major retailers such as Superdrug and Boots is a testament to her resilience and passion.

Beyond the boardroom, Kam Davis stands as a beacon of inspiration, proving that one can achieve greatness in both personal and professional spheres. Her journey is not just a story of business triumph; it is a narrative of empowerment, innovation, and the fulfillment of dreams—a true testament to the extraordinary woman behind Nylah's Naturals

Where are they now? Take inspiration from those who have done it before.

12:10 - 13:00 Ashtead Suite

PANEL SPEAKERS - PAST PITCH UP PARTICIPANTS



Mark Platt

Co-founder, Figura Analytics (2021 Pitch Up winner)

Until 2022 Mark was a Reader of Nanotechnology within the chemistry department of Loughborough University. Having joined the dept in April 2012 as a probationary lecturer, developing the area of aptamer sensors and resistive pulse sensors. He grew the research and impact over the 10 years to become a global leader in the field, working with collaborators in a range of industries and disciplines. The research developed novel IP and in 2019/20 Mark and Rhush Maugi explored the market fit and opportunity. They launched a spinout company called "Figura Analytics" in 2021. Mark is now the CTO of the company and seconded into the company full time.

Figura Analytics aims to revolutionize the speed and accuracy of liquid analysis. The technology counts particles, of all shapes and sizes, to give you a 'fingerprint' of what your sample should look like. Launched in 2021 with £300k Innovate-UK funding, Figura Analytics secured >£900K of Venture Capital and Angel Investment. The beachhead market was the drinks industry, monitoring quality and microbiological contaminants. Working with Coca-Cola, Britvic, Tennents, St Austell Brewery and many others to validate the technology. In 2023 Figura launched its products and are growing sales in the UK and Europe, and more recently have been exploring the fit in medical, life sciences and pharmaceutical markets.



Surlender Pendress

Co-founder, Love Writing Co. (2021 Pitch Up finalist)

Surlender Pendress is versatile entrepreneur of children's resources focused on the early learning resources and publishing sector.

As Co-founder of "Love Writing Co " Surlender seamlessly combines a passion for creating educational products with her e-commerce expertise. She has transformed her venture into a go-to platform for parents and educators seeking innovative writing tools.

Having the ability to understand the early learning sector needs and translate them into visually striking designs and innovative resources sets her apart.



Dhruv Ranpura

Co-founder of tuck. (2023 Pitch Up contestant)

Dhruv comes from a background in Technology and Cybersecurity with notable industry experience from companies such as St James' Place Wealth Management (Hong Kong), KPMG and BCS Consulting.

Having graduated from the University of Manchester with a degree in Economics, Dhruv went on to work at start-up challenger Atom Bank. It was here that his passion for technology and building game-changing problem-solving solutions started. Now, Dhruv has co-founded tuck. a hospitality tech start-up called tuck. and has raised £750,000 in investment from notable angel investors and a VC.

FINAL ~ 15:00-16:15 ~ Belmont Suite

Panellists



Aanisah Begg - West Midlands Combined Authority

Aanisah is Head of Investment at the West Midlands Combined Authority, focusing on the delivery of investment strategy for the WMCA, including initiating and delivering innovative projects which leverage both public and private sector investment. Most notably, Aanisah successfully created and launched WMCA's first investment fund - the West Midlands Co-Investment Fund, a £25m fund making equity investment into the region's high-growth potential SMEs.

Prior to this, Aanisah spent eight years at Midven, a venture capital firm focused on investing into early-stage and high growth businesses within the West Midlands region.



Surjit Kooner - Midven, part of Future Planet Capital

Surjit joined Midven Limited in August 2005. He is Fund Principal and Investment Committee Member for the MEIF 1 West Midlands Equity Fund as well as having an ongoing similar role for the West Midlands Co-Investment Fund. He is a Chartered Accountant with over eighteen years fund management experience and a further seven years experience advising small and medium sized private companies, particularly in the area of fund raising.

Surjit has a degree in Economics and Finance from Brunel University and a Masters in Corporate Strategy & Governance from Nottingham University.



Pam Sheemar - NatWest

Pam Sheemar Regional Director Enterprise, Midlands and East of England, leads the entrepreneurship delivery team for NatWest and has over 10 years' experience in the banking and finance sector. Her previous roles have included Director for Commercial Banking, leading a team of Relationship Directors and Managers who portfolio managed 100's of business customers from £2m to £45 million turnover.

With extensive experience in entrepreneurship leading the longest standing NatWest Accelerator, Pam is also a coach and mentor to many start-ups and scale ups. She is also the founding Director for Birmingham Tech since 2019 and its recent rebrand to TechWM, positively impacting the Tech Start-Up and Scale-Up ecosystem.

Pam is passionate about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and this runs through all that she does, leading change across her industry as Global Chair of the Natwest Multicultural Network. Pam is also a Magistrate sitting on Crime bench and extends this work to Diversity Community Relations Magistrate.

HOW TO VOTE FOR THE WINNER

FINAL ~ 15:00 - 16:15
Belmont Suite



vevox
Audience Engagement

TO VOTE DURING THE FINAL:

Scan the QR code and vote

OR

1: Type **vevox.app** into a browser (Google, Safari, Firefox etc.)



2: Enter this session ID: **172-442-964**

THANK YOU

Minerva Birmingham Pitch Up would like to thank;

all panellists who have volunteered their time and support to the competition shortlisting this year. Panellists include representatives from :



NatWest



And contestants that didn't compete in the finals but impressed judges so much we welcomed them to showcase their business at Venturefest 2024.



SPONSORSHIP

Minerva Birmingham Pitch Up would like to thank our sponsors, NatWest Bank for sponsoring and being involved in this years competition.



NatWest

NatWest, Royal Bank of Scotland and Ulster Bank serve customers across the country, supporting them with their personal, private, and business banking needs. NatWest helps customers at all stages in their lives, from opening student accounts, to buying their first home, setting up a business, and saving for retirement. Alongside a wide range of banking services, the bank also offers businesses specialist sector knowledge in areas such as sustainable energy, commercial property, and technology, as well as access to specialist entrepreneurial support.

For more information visit:

Website: www.natwest.com/business

Contact address for businesses:

Harinder Kunor (MIOEE)
Regional EcoSystem Manager, West Midlands

E- mail: Harinder.kunor@natwest.com



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