

# LET'S DO THIS!

A SPECIAL REPORT  
INTO THE STATE OF  
UK ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
IN 2020



*WITH EXCLUSIVE NEW  
ONEPOLL SURVEY FINDINGS*

Supported by



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## Understanding our entrepreneurial DNA

ONLY BY KNOWING YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS' CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS CAN WE SUPPORT THEM THROUGH TO SUCCESS. THAT'S WHY WE COMMISSIONED THIS IMPORTANT NEW RESEARCH



**Tim Jones CBE**  
Executive Director,  
Tata Limited

The Tata group may be a global corporate giant, with more than 100 independently operating companies, revenues of over \$113bn and more than 720,000 employees, but it is also an organisation with entrepreneurialism in its DNA.

The business was founded by Jamsetji Tata back in 1868, when he was just 29. A spectacular serial entrepreneur, he went from constructing cotton mills to building the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, the first hotel in India to have electricity, German elevators, Turkish baths, American fans and English butlers.

And he didn't stop there. His vision included setting up an iron and steel company, generating hydroelectric power and creating a world-class educational institution in India. He donated nearly half of his fortune to setting up the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. 'In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder, but is in fact the very purpose of its existence,' he said.

Former Tata chairman Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (known as JRD) was another audacious and pioneering entrepreneur. He

was the first person to qualify as a pilot in India (his licence bore the number one) and he set up India's first air mail service, which evolved into Air India. He also launched Tata Consultancy Services in 1968, computerising company paperwork; today, it's the most profitable company in the whole Tata group, supplying computer software that provides digital transformations for household names around the world.

In 1991, another member of the family, Ratan Tata, took the reins and oversaw two decades of dramatic growth, buying steel-maker Corus, tea-maker Tetley and luxury car group Jaguar Land Rover, and introducing the world's cheapest car, the Tata Nano.

Whether we're launching new services, forming joint ventures or investing in high-growth companies, the Tata group continues to innovate and celebrate entrepreneurial adventure – no matter how big we get.

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WHETHER WE'RE LAUNCHING NEW SERVICES, FORMING JOINT VENTURES OR INVESTING IN HIGH-GROWTH COMPANIES, THE TATA GROUP CONTINUES TO INNOVATE AND CELEBRATE ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVENTURE



How the Tata Varsity Pitch supports young entrepreneurs  
Page 14

That's why we run the annual Tata Varsity Pitch Competition, powered by NACUE. This early-stage pitching competition shines a light on the best businesses coming out of colleges and universities across the UK. It showcases the next generation of visionaries, pioneers and problem-solvers.

We wanted to delve deeper into what drives the country's young entrepreneurs and what keeps them awake at night. From their views on the year ahead and their attitudes to risk, to the skills needed for start-up success, this report taps into the mindset of British business owners aged between 18 and 30. It also explores the public's view of entrepreneurship: how valued it is as a career choice and whether it should be part of the national curriculum.

It's only by understanding this unique cohort – and the public's perception of them – that we can help support them. They're not the competition: they are tomorrow's businesses.

## An entrepreneurial Britain is a prosperous Britain

IT'S HIGHLY ENCOURAGING TO SEE YOUNG UK ENTREPRENEURS SO POSITIVE ABOUT THE FUTURE. NOW'S THE TIME TO INJECT MORE ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING INTO OUR SCHOOLS

Make no mistake: entrepreneurs are the growth engine of our economy. Over the past two decades, start-ups and SMEs have been responsible for all net job creation in the country. Not only that, but these firms also contribute to economic dynamism by injecting competition into markets and spurring innovation. Without entrepreneurs, Britain's economy would stagnate.

NACUE's mission is to power the enterprising generation. It was started in 2008 by 12 enterprise society presidents from universities across the UK. These students



**Timothy Barnes**  
Chairman, NACUE  
Board of Trustees

were already playing a leading role in supporting and developing entrepreneurship at their universities – but they knew that collaboratively they could create something bigger and better. This community wasn't about the academic teaching of entrepreneurship; it was about support, inspiration and the practical 'doing'.

Those original 12 society presidents sparked an extraordinary movement. NACUE has grown into a national charity with a thriving network representing more than 200 college and university enterprise societies across the country. The annual Tata Varsity Pitch is a brilliant example of how we help student entrepreneurs to cross institutional walls, raise their profile and realise their potential. It's a showcase for the entrepreneurial talent and innovation that exists in our young people.

Britain's young entrepreneurs are a hugely optimistic bunch. They believe they can beat the odds, create something new and bring change.

In times of uncertainty and disruption, they don't hunker down: they simply move faster, spot new markets and innovate quicker. They make things happen.

That's not to say they're gung-ho. This report shows that young entrepreneurs are motivated by independence over money: they want to be their own boss, control their own work/life balance and create their own company culture. They're not yet ready to do something radical: they're busy arming themselves with skills and experience so they change the world in the future. They know there is a lot still to learn to maximise their chances of success.

Entrepreneurship has become a credible career choice, with 50% of the UK public saying they'd encourage their own children to start a business. It's absolutely crucial we sow the seeds early on. Schools should present entrepreneurship as a legitimate option and show that you don't need to wait for someone to give you a job, you can go out and create your own. We need to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs and help their enterprises to flourish. An entrepreneurial Britain is a prosperous Britain.



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# SURVEY RESULTS



## BACKGROUND

■ Young entrepreneurs are the future of the UK economy. People under 35 start more businesses now than in previous generations, and their businesses employ more people and generate greater profit. It's crucial to find out what drives this unique cohort, and what support they need to succeed.

- This research was conducted by OnePoll in January 2020. There were two parallel surveys: one polled 2,000 members of the general public; the other polled 90 UK young entrepreneurs, defined as self-employed individuals aged between 18 and 30 and employing at least one member of staff.
- The purpose of this twin-track approach was to explore both the views of young entrepreneurs and the public's view of entrepreneurship.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**53%** OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC BELIEVE ENTREPRENEURS HAVE A HIGH STATUS IN SOCIETY

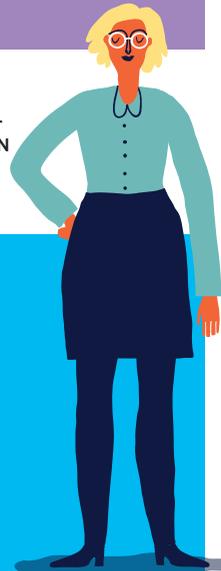
- Over half (51%) of young entrepreneurs are feeling more optimistic about 2020 than they were about 2019
- Three-quarters of young entrepreneurs feel positive about the performance of their firms over the next five years
- 80% of young entrepreneurs said that their experience of being an entrepreneur had been better than expected
- More than half (51%) of young entrepreneurs say that the UK government does not provide enough support



**57%** OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC BELIEVE THAT STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS IS A GOOD CAREER CHOICE

### YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS TODAY PRIORITISE...

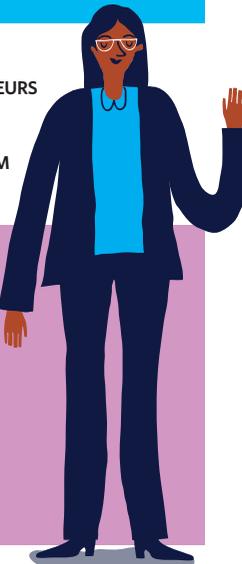
- Good company culture 43%
- Creating high-value products or services 42%
- Being ethical 41%
- Sound financial management 41%



**73%** OF YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS ARE IN FAVOUR OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP BEING PART OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

### THE MAIN OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

- Brexit 33%
- The state of the economy 24%
- The level of taxation 23%



**73%** OF YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS BELIEVE THAT THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO START AND RUN A BUSINESS CAN BE TAUGHT

So how are young entrepreneurs feeling in 2020? And what does the UK public think about entrepreneurship? Let's find out...

## 1. THEY'RE BULLISH

Britain's young entrepreneurs are feeling confident about their prospects this year. More than half (51%) say they are much more optimistic going into 2020 than in 2019; 32% say they are somewhat more optimistic. Just 9% are somewhat or very pessimistic about the coming year.

They aren't blind to the challenges: a third cite Brexit as a major obstacle to growth. The state of the economy (24%), levels of taxation (23%), getting publicity (22%) and the struggle to hire great people (21%) are their other top-five challenges.

Despite the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the impact of Brexit, these business owners believe that the next 12 months will be positive for their ventures; just 5% express concern. This bullishness is evident

over the long term too. Three-quarters of Britain's young entrepreneurs are feeling positive about the performance of their firms over the next five years. More than half (55%) expect to increase turnover over that period, 44% will hire more people and 40% expect to raise investment.

Most young entrepreneurs enjoy the experience of running a business. When asked how the reality of being an entrepreneur compared to their expectations, four-fifths said it was much better or somewhat better than expected (30% and 50% respectively). Only 1% said that the experience has been much worse than expected. A stonking 80% would recommend entrepreneurship as a career choice to their children.

Notably, almost two-thirds (60%) of these entrepreneurs believe that the UK remains a great place to start and run a business, and half say it will continue to be favourable for the next five years (57%).

Compared to 2019, how would you describe your attitude going into 2020?	
Choice	%
Much more optimistic	51%
Somewhat more optimistic	32%
No more optimistic or pessimistic	8%
Somewhat more pessimistic	6%
Much more pessimistic	3%

How would you describe how you feel about the immediate future of your business (i.e. over the next 12 months)?	
Choice	%
Very optimistic	47%
Somewhat optimistic	32%
Neither optimistic nor pessimistic	16%
Somewhat pessimistic	4%
Very pessimistic	1%

£72bn

ONE IN FOUR BRITS ARE RUNNING BUSINESSES ALONGSIDE THEIR DAY JOB, CONTRIBUTING AN ESTIMATED £72BN TO THE UK ECONOMY

## 2. STEREOTYPES ARE CHANGING

With each passing year, the old stereotype of an entrepreneur as a wheeler-dealer 'Del Boy' type is further eroded. Young entrepreneurs today prioritise a good company culture (43%), creating quality, high-value products or services (42%), being ethical (41%), sound financial management (41%) and a solid business model (41%), moving away from a myopic focus on profit or growth. Only one in ten cites 'tolerance of risk' as an important skill in business.

The 2020 cohort of young entrepreneurs put ethics before ego. So what motivates most young entrepreneurs to start their own businesses? 'Being my own boss' takes the top spot (67%), followed by improving work/life balance (51%) and financial success (48%). Money is the main factor in starting a business for just 27% of respondents. A third cite 'behaving ethically' (31%), 'behaving in an environmentally sustainable way' (31%) or 'providing products/services that support my community' (37%) as their motivations.

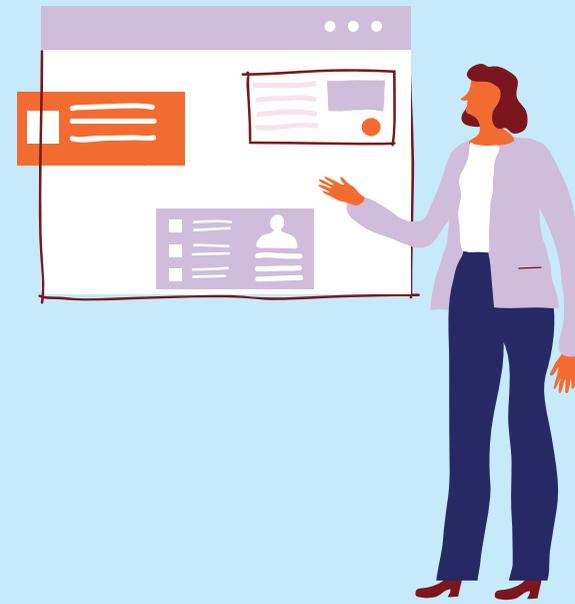
More than a quarter (28%) started a business to support social causes they are passionate about.

Which of the following do you hope to prioritise/continue to prioritise as your business grows?	
Choice	%
Developing community relations (CSR)	22%
Being ethical	41%
Leadership	40%
Good employee culture	43%
Financial management	41%
Employee welfare	33%
Continuing to innovate	28%
Providing a product or service of value and quality	42%
Creating a good business model	41%
None of the above	2%

## WHAT DOES BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR MEAN TO YOU?

'I REALLY LOVE HAVING SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF IN OWNING MY BUSINESS. I LOVE BEING SELF-RELIANT AND BEING MY OWN BOSS. HAVING NO ONE TO ANSWER TO BUT MYSELF AND ALLOWING MYSELF TO FULLY FOCUS AND PUT MY PASSION INTO MY OWN PROJECT IS VERY MOTIVATING'

'HAVING CONTROL OVER HOW ETHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY MY COMPANY IS, AND HELPING PEOPLE'



## 3. THEY'RE COMPETITIVE AND EMBRACE RISK

Over the past decade, the barriers to starting a business have reduced dramatically. It has never been easier to register a start-up, begin trading and get the word out. It's estimated that one in four Brits are running at least one 'side business' alongside their day job, contributing an estimated £72bn to the UK economy.

It's fascinating to see this enterprising spirit so evident in our survey of the general public. Back in 2010, a government survey of public attitudes towards entrepreneurs found that 58% of the general public felt positively towards business owners, but just 40% identified any entrepreneurial characteristics within themselves. Yet almost half of the respondents in this survey (45%), a decade later, believe they have the skills and experience to start a business. Indeed, 21% have started a business in the past, and 35% claim to have considered it.

Whether it's a willingness to keep learning, or the ability to perform well during stressful situations, rebound from failure, break rules or learn from mistakes, the public displays many entrepreneurial qualities, often rating themselves higher than the young entrepreneurs in the separate survey.

Entrepreneurs rated themselves marginally better at taking on new challenges, turning problems into opportunities and embracing uncertainty, compared to the public. They are much better - ironically - at taking orders! Some 36% of young entrepreneurs respond well to authority, compared to 29% of the general public.

Interestingly, the areas where entrepreneurs believe themselves to excel and where the general public does not are competitiveness, the willingness to lead and the appetite for risk. More than a third (35%) of the young entrepreneurs enjoy taking risks, compared to 18% of the public. Competition brings out the best in 28% of entrepreneurs, compared to 24% generally.

Entrepreneurs and the general public differ in other ways too. Half of the entrepreneurs cite passion as the top skill for career success, whereas 'being able to work as part of a team' is the top skill for the public.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'I have the skills/experience to start a business'	
Choice	%
Strongly agree	16%
Somewhat agree	29%
Neither agree nor disagree	27%
Somewhat disagree	17%
Strongly disagree	11%

## 4. ENTREPRENEURS ENJOY HIGHER PUBLIC STATUS THAN EVER

When asked about their perception of entrepreneurs, members of the public are typically positive. More than half (53%) said that entrepreneurs have a high status in society, 41% weren't sure and fewer than one in ten disagreed (7%). Some 57% believe that starting your own business is a good career choice, and only 6% think it is a poor choice. Fewer than one in ten (8%) are opposed to their children becoming business owners, while 50% would actively encourage this career choice.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'Starting a business is a good career choice'	
Choice	%
Strongly agree	16%
Somewhat agree	41%
Neither agree nor disagree	37%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	1%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'Entrepreneurs have a high status in society'	
Choice	%
Strongly agree	13%
Somewhat agree	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	41%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	1%

Which of the following would you say are true of you?	
Choice	%
I'm always willing to take on a new challenge	42%
I embrace uncertainty	18%
If other people see problems, I see opportunities	23%
I believe in constantly challenging myself	33%
I am always learning	62%
In stressful situations, I perform at my best	25%
When in doubt, I act	24%
Competition brings out the best in me	24%
In order to keep learning, it's important to make mistakes	46%
I rebound and move on after a failure	36%
I enjoy the responsibilities of leadership	26%
In order to make progress, sometimes rules have to be broken	27%
My long-term financial stability is about building a good pension	24%
I respond well to authority	29%
My primary driver is the ability to control my own destiny	25%
I would jump at the opportunity of a new, well-paid job at a big company	24%
I am driven by securing stability over freedom	20%
I am comfortable with failure	20%
I enjoy taking risks	19%
None of the above	5%



## 5. ENTREPRENEURIALISM STARTS YOUNG

The majority of the young entrepreneurs in our survey (73%) believe that the skills required to start and run a business can be taught. Just 9% disagree and the balance is unsure. Young business owners are overwhelmingly in favour of teaching entrepreneurship in schools: 73% are for, 16% against and 11% are not sure. Entrepreneurs reckon the sweet spot for such classes would be between the ages of nine and 18. Their belief that entrepreneurs are made, not born, tallies with research from Professor Kathryn Shaw at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. She polled 2.8 million small businesses and found that the greatest determinant for success was experience, not whether there was a genetic predilection for entrepreneurship. A separate study by the European Commission in 2014 showed that students who receive enterprise education are between three and six times more likely to start a business in the future. Entrepreneurial skills seem to manifest early, however. Most of the young business owners polled started their first business between the ages of 15 and 17. Role models can be a crucial factor: the number one inspiration for starting a business was having entrepreneurial parents (29%), followed by experiences at school (23%). It is worth noting that many business owners had their entrepreneurial spirit nurtured by parents. Some 68% said their guardians were 'very positive' or 'somewhat positive' about their career choice.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? 'Entrepreneurship (i.e. taking a financial risk to start and run your own business) can be taught'	
Choice	%
Strongly agree	37%
Somewhat agree	36%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%
Somewhat disagree	8%
Strongly disagree	1%



## 6. A NOTE OF CAUTION

Yes, young entrepreneurs are thriving in the UK, but more can be done to boost this vital sector of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Almost one in ten young business people believe the number of young people starting businesses is set to fall over the next five years.

More than half of young business owners say that the UK government does not provide enough support. In addition, 41% would consider taking a well-paid job with a large corporation if it were on offer. The combination of economic uncertainty and a lack of security is clearly a real concern.

And when we asked the general public what had stopped them from starting a business, the top answer was 'lack of funds' (59%), suggesting that it is still too costly to create and grow a company.

In general, how supportive would you say the UK government is to young entrepreneurs?	
Choice	%
Very supportive	27%
Somewhat supportive	19%
Not particularly supportive	41%
Not at all supportive	10%
N/A; I don't know	3%



## MY TEN TAKE-HOMES

After suffering chronic eczema as a child, designer **Lauren Bell** spotted a gap in the market for a product to ease the itching and discomfort of the skin condition. She launched Cosi Care in 2018; 'cosi' is Welsh for 'itching'. In 2019, Bell won the Tata Varsity Pitch Competition with her design - a starfish-shaped, non-medical device that uses the sensation of cold to relieve eczema. At just 26 years old, Bell has raised a significant amount of investment, and will launch her first product this summer.



### 1. **TURN YOUR PASSION INTO YOUR PURPOSE**

I used to get eczema really badly when I was younger, and my younger brother had severe eczema too. I wanted to solve the problem to help families such as ours. Starting a business is really scary. I had the option to take a steady job with a big company. My personal experience with eczema has been the driving force behind my company, and that has kept me going, even during tough times.

### 2. **SAY YES**

I say yes to everything, whether it's attending an event, an introduction or a coffee with a new contact. You never know what may come of that event or meeting. I have found that the more times I say yes, the more doors open for me.

### 3. **DON'T BE AFRAID TO ADMIT YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER...**

When you're building a business, there's a lot of pressure to have all the answers. In the early days, I wish I'd known that it was okay to admit I didn't know something. I wanted to seem professional but

sometimes I would have to rush home and Google an acronym or phrase I didn't understand. Now I am a lot more confident, so I am honest when I don't understand something. I'm not embarrassed. Asking questions ultimately puts you in a more powerful position.

### 4. **... BUT WORK HARD TO EDUCATE YOURSELF**

I found online tutorials really useful for getting to grips with the tools you need to grow a business. I immersed myself in learning how to write a business plan, for example. I was rubbish with numbers before I started Cosi Care, but now I can write financial projections and understand a balance sheet. That's really important, especially if you want to raise investment.

### 5. **KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY**

Cosi Care operates within the eczema and skin disease sector, so I have talked to lots of doctors, dermatologists and

parents of children with eczema. You need to have a broad understanding of the whole field so that you understand the market you're addressing.

### 6. **EMBRACE THE START-UP COMMUNITY**

It can be really lonely being a solo founder, but there are lots of people out there who are on a similar journey. Throw yourself into the start-up scene. It's smaller than you think, and seeing the same people at different events helps you to create a network. This has really come in handy for me. Don't forget your old friends, though. I check in with my university mentors regularly because they are very knowledgeable.

### 7. **PRICE POINT IS IMPORTANT**

If you're creating a product, it's really important to keep price point and margin at the

forefront of your mind. It's really easy to get carried away with making a beautiful product with great packaging, but you need to remember that it has to be commercially viable, too.

### 8. **THINK ABOUT WHY YOU'RE RAISING EXTERNAL FUNDS**

I've been looking to raise money to grow my business, and it's a very demanding process. It also forces you to ask yourself some tough questions, such as: do you want to have a small slice of something big or the whole of something tiny?

### 9. **INVESTORS SHOULD BRING MORE THAN MONEY**

When looking for investment, it's important to me to look at what investors can bring besides capital. Yes, the funds are important, but I'm also looking for other benefits that they'll bring



to my business, such as experience in my chosen market and knowledge of manufacturing in China.

### 10. **BEWARE BURNOUT**

I'm really structured in how I manage my time. I work incredibly hard Monday to Friday, but on the weekends I don't even think about work. It's easy to fall into the habit of sitting at your laptop 14 hours a day, losing touch with friends and not making time for family. That's dangerous and can make you really unhappy, so I am very strict with myself. I am much more productive on Monday because I have had a break.



THROW YOURSELF INTO THE START-UP SCENE. IT'S SMALLER THAN YOU THINK, AND SEEING THE SAME PEOPLE AT DIFFERENT EVENTS HELPS YOU TO CREATE A NETWORK

★ SWOGO

Tech firm Swogo helps online retailers make bigger, better sales. Founded in 2012 by Anthony Ng Monica, Ivor Stankov, Lucy Foster, Andre Rego and Dimitar Kazakov, Swogo started life as a free-to-use laptop recommendation service, helping customers to buy a suitable device based on a series of simple questions. Now its technology is helping brands such as El Corte Inglés, John Lewis, Decathlon and Sephora to cross-sell relevant products online: automatically matching a bed frame with a mattress and sheets, or the right batteries with a remote control car, for example. With offices in London and Lisbon, it's been named a Top 25 Most Innovative Retail company by *Retail Week*.  
▶ Varsity Pitch winner 2012



# ALUMNI PROFILES

THE TATA VARSITY PITCH COMPETITION HAS SUPPORTED SOME OF BRITAIN'S MOST INNOVATIVE AND FASTEST-GROWING START-UPS OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS



▲ CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: ELENA DIECKMANN AND RYAN ROBINSON; ELLENOR MCINTOSH AND AL BOZORGI; THOMAS FUDGE; DOUBLE DUTCH CO-FOUNDERS RAISSA AND JOYCE DE HAAS; AND THE TEAM AT SWOGO

DOUBLE DUTCH

Twin co-founders Raissa and Joyce de Haas launched their award-winning premium drinks brand Double Dutch in 2015 after noticing a lack of innovation in the mixer market. Since then, they have received numerous accolades for their revolutionary tonics and mixers, including a Foodpreneur Award from Sir Richard Branson. Low-calorie, vegan-friendly and 100% natural, using sustainably sourced organic ingredients, Double Dutch mixers enhance the enjoyment of all spirits. The brand sells more than half a million bottles per month to 25 countries worldwide, and is sold in bars and restaurants across the

UK, as well as via Waitrose, Amazon and Ocado.

▶ Varsity Pitch finalist 2016

★ WASE

After studying product design at Bournemouth University, Thomas Fudge volunteered as a teacher in Ghana and was shocked by the poor sanitation facilities out there. 'Everyone deserves access to clean water and the dignity of a toilet,' he says. Determined to make a difference, he started a PhD at Brunel University focusing on sanitation and energy systems in developing



regions. Out of his research, social enterprise Wase was born. Launched in 2016, Wase uses revolutionary electromethanogenic reactor technology to transform waste water into fertiliser and biogas, which can then be used to provide heating and electricity. Wase is currently working on waste-water treatments in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya and in the north Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, where more than 110 million people defecate in the open – with crippling health, social and economic consequences. Last year, Fudge was named Young Environmentalist of the Year by charity and professional body CIWEM.

▶ Varsity Pitch winner 2018



TWIPES

Unflushable wipes make up around 93% of the material causing sewer blockages, according to water industry body Water UK. Step in former University of London students Ellenor McIntosh and Al Bozorgi. The eco-entrepreneurs have created Twipes, the world's first truly flushable toilet wipes. Antibacterial and made out of wood pulp, Twipes don't contain any microplastics or harsh chemicals, and break down in water in as little as three hours.  
▶ Varsity Pitch finalist 2017

CHIP[S] BOARD

Appalled by the short lifespan and environmental impact of materials such as chipboard and MDF, London-based designers Rowan Minkley and Robert Nicoll decided to create an eco-friendly alternative – out of potatoes. They take waste potato peelings (sourced from McCain) and turn them into bio-plastics and bio-plastic composites, which contain zero toxic resins or chemicals and are biodegradable. Started in 2018, Chip[s] Board's materials are used in everything from fashion to furniture.  
▶ Varsity Pitch finalist 2018



★ AEROPOWDER

Globally, we consume around 134 million chickens every day. The feathers, which make up around 5% of a bird's weight, are incinerated, chucked into landfill or turned into low-grade animal feed. Innovation design engineer Elena Dieckmann and biological scientist Ryan Robinson decided at the end of 2015 to 'rethink waste feathers' – and their student project quickly turned into a business. Based in Battersea, London, Aeropowder turns surplus feathers into a unique, high-performance insulation textile, which is then covered with a compostable film. The result: a product that can be used to replace polystyrene packaging. With the global sustainable packaging market expected to reach \$440.3bn by 2025, Aeropowder looks set to fly.  
▶ Varsity Pitch winner 2016



★ BERYL

Emily Brooke's eureka moment happened as she was cycling behind a truck. She decided to tackle bike safety as her final-year project at Brighton University and invented the Laserlight, which projects a fluorescent image of a bike five metres ahead to alert drivers that a cyclist is coming. She started Blaze (now known as Beryl) in 2012

and, within three years, she'd raised £1m in funding and partnered with Santander and Transport for London. 'It was a rollercoaster ride. I was terrified,' she admits. 'I quickly realised that getting on and "doing" is far better than thinking and planning. So that was my first lesson: just crack on.' Today Beryl employs more than 30 people at its offices in Hackney, London,

and has expanded its product range to include the lightweight Pixel, the Burner brake – which intensifies as you slow down – and a rebooted, lower-priced Laserlight Core. Beryl has also launched its own bike range (a 'green bike for green cities'), app and bike-share scheme.  
▶ Varsity Pitch winner 2013



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TATA VARSITY PITCH

Varsity Pitch was founded in 2010 by the National Association of College and University Entrepreneurs (NACUE). It was the first competition to celebrate and support the young entrepreneurs coming out of British universities.

Unlike many other competitions, which celebrate individual industries or focus on specific cities or regions, Varsity Pitch welcomes young entrepreneurs from all across the UK, operating in any sector.

The Tata group was a founding partner of Varsity Pitch. The group is committed to supporting the next generation of young entrepreneurs.

## BOOSTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- The winner of the Varsity Pitch receives a cash prize to put towards their growing start-up. Between 2010 and 2018, that prize was set at £10,000. Last year, Tata increased the pot to £15,000.
- Support for the finalists goes way beyond pure capital. They are all invited to meet with mentors from Tata to share their goals and challenges. Tata is committed to making key connections that can help these young entrepreneurs achieve their dreams.
- Failure is a reality of the start-up ecosystem: it is estimated that 60% of start-ups fail within three years. However, the finalists of Varsity Pitch have fared far better than the national average. Six of the ten winners are still running.



▲ IN 2012 THE BOOTCAMP WAS LAUNCHED, WHICH GAVE FINALISTS ACCESS TO EXCITING MENTORS. THIS WAS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FINALISTS TO HONE THEIR BUSINESS PLANS AND GET ADVICE ON ANYTHING FROM MARKETING TO RAISING FINANCE. IN 2014 IT WAS EXTENDED FROM A HALF-DAY SESSION TO A FULL DAY.

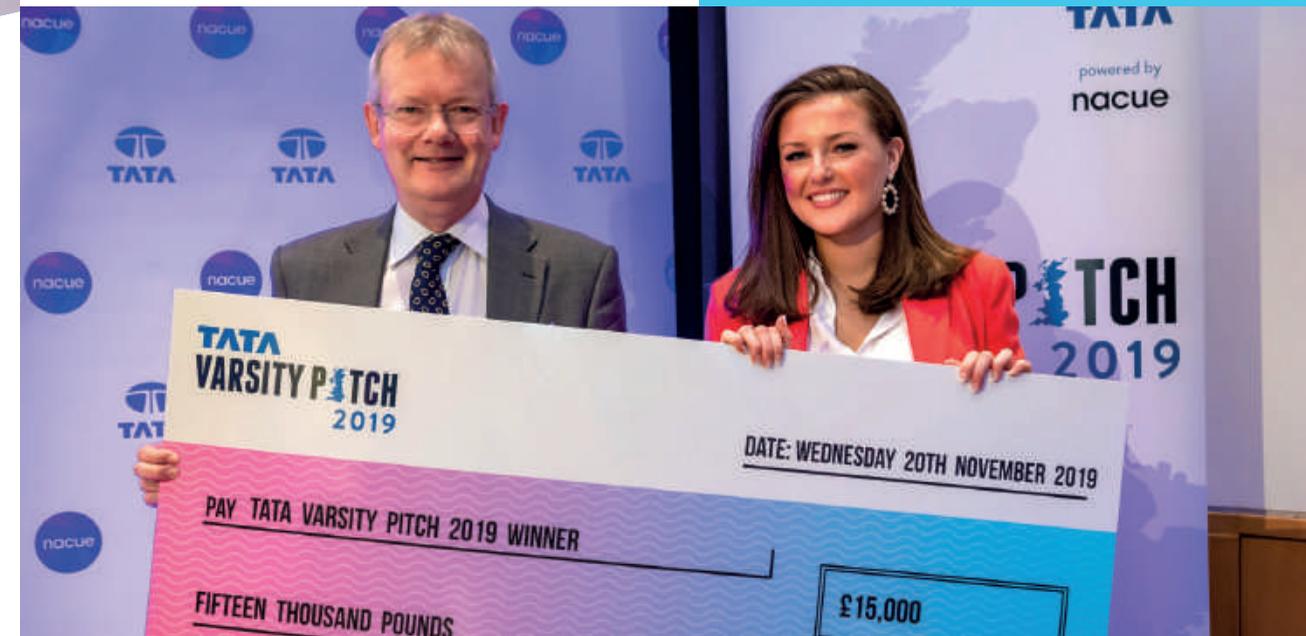


▲ IN 2015, THE ONLINE PEOPLE'S VOTE WAS LAUNCHED, WHICH GAVE ONE START-UP A DIRECT PASS TO THE GRAND FINALS. LAST YEAR, 37,000 VOTES WERE CAST ONLINE.



## 2019

▲ IN 2019, THE TATA GROUP EXTENDED ITS ROLE WITH VARSITY PITCH, BECOMING THE HEADLINE SPONSOR. THE COMPETITION WAS RENAMED THE TATA VARSITY PITCH.



## EVOLVING WITH THE TIMES

- The Tata Varsity Pitch has witnessed some exciting trends over the past decade. In its first year, the competition received just 57 entries; just 33% were female. In 2019, Varsity Pitch had 424 entrants; 41% were women.
- Across the past ten years of Varsity Pitch, 54% of the overall winners have been female entrepreneurs.
- In the early days of the competition, most entrants hailed from London, which is where the competition was founded. Over the years, the regional split has become much more diverse. The number of London-based entrants has dropped from 80% in 2010 to 50% now.
- Some of the past winners of the competition include: Beryl (formerly Blaze), the maker of an innovative bike light to reduce urban cycling accidents; Tio Toys, motorised building blocks for kids that can be controlled by smartphones; decentralised waste-water treatment start-up Wase; and Cosi Case, which makes a handheld device for relieving the itching of eczema.
- Over the last three years, more and more entrants have been focusing on sustainability and health. These are now by far the most subscribed categories, reflecting society's concern with the future of the planet and the wellbeing of humanity.

## TATA'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE UK ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM

# 1.

### SUPPORT A CULTURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH THE UK EDUCATION SYSTEM

Both the general public and young entrepreneurs agree that entrepreneurship should be included in the national curriculum. More broadly, exposure to experiences showcasing entrepreneurship and greater prominence of entrepreneurship as a career pathway would be welcome within the UK education system.

# 2.

### THE UK GOVERNMENT SHOULD STRENGTHEN THE OVERALL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT TO ALLOW ENTREPRENEURS THE GREATEST CHANCES OF SUCCESS

Our findings in this report have identified that the three biggest challenges that entrepreneurs grapple with are the potential impact of Brexit, the state of the economy and taxation levels and administration.

We encourage the government to focus relentlessly on improving the business environment for those setting out and developing businesses. Removing administrative burdens, simplifying taxation and maintaining a strong and vibrant economy across all regions are key areas of work.

The World Bank's 2019 *Doing Business* report showed the UK is currently ranked eighth for 'ease of doing business'. Over the next three years we challenge the government to boost the UK's ranking to a consistent top-five position.

# 3.

### SEIZE THE SENSE OF OPTIMISM THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE SHOWN ABOUT THE UK ECONOMY AND THEIR OWN BUSINESS PLANS

Some 76% of young entrepreneurs in our new survey say that they are optimistic about the longer-term future of their business. However, just over half of young entrepreneurs believe the government is not particularly supportive or not at all supportive.

The UK government needs to take advantage of this 'post-Brexit bounce' and do more to show that it is firmly behind tomorrow's business leaders. Young entrepreneurs are giving the UK a strong vote of confidence, but it is clear that more support from government would be welcomed. Government policies that support entrepreneurship, innovation and investment have the potential to unleash a wave of new business growth.

# 4.

### CORPORATES NEED TO TAP INTO THE VALUES OF YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

Corporates should recognise the increasingly values-driven approach to business that attracts young entrepreneurial talent and ensure they are demonstrating this through authentic commitments to society.



Supported by



If you would like any further information or discussions on any of the contents or topics included in this report, please contact [tofayal.ahmed@tata.co.uk](mailto:tofayal.ahmed@tata.co.uk)