

Start-ups and entrepreneurship

Becoming an entrepreneur is a popular aspiration for an increasing number of students, as is founding or working for a start-up or spin-out.

Entrepreneurship offers a chance to build mindsets and skillsets, turn ideas into reality, and to develop solutions to problems you see in the world. Whether the dream is to start something new, or to join an already established company, it's a dynamic path that requires innovation, resourcefulness, and commercial awareness.

Working for yourself

As a self-employed person, you will have flexibility and independence, make the decisions and drive the business. In addition to creating and delivering your service or product, you will need to consider business development (sales) how you market yourself, your business name, website, brand equity, competitive edge to obtain customers.

But every business has many 'moving parts' alongside product creation, marketing and sales. As a business owner, you will need to also consider how to finance the business; where to find trusted advisers or how to recruit and build your own team; contracting and managing people; and the legal and regulatory requirements relating to establishing the enterprise, protecting any intellectual property (IP), and financial reporting.





Creating a 1-page [Lean Canvas](#) is a good starting point and provides a foundation to develop your thinking further. It provides a route to:

- set out the problem you are trying to solve and your solution;
- identify your customers, your competition and your advantage; and
- consider your costs, your revenues and key metrics.

Support when making a start

There are many different types of business, such as a traditional for-profit business, a social enterprise, or a non-profit. It's also possible to operate as a sole trader, or a [freelancer](#), or to establish either a limited liability partnership (LLP) or private limited company (PLC).

[EnSpire Oxford](#), the University of Oxford's Entrepreneurship Hub, can help you navigate the wider Oxford entrepreneurship ecosystem. There are resources, courses and opportunities to inspire and equip would-be business creators, and programmes and competitions to learn how to build and pitch your business plan and move an idea to launch and growth in a supportive environment. In addition to the external organisations listed below, look



for training, competitions and opportunities for support led by EnSpire Oxford, the Careers Service, the Saïd Business School (e.g. [E School](#)), and student societies and the university's [Innovation Startup Incubator](#) and groups in the [Social Shifters programme](#).

The challenges and risks can be daunting, and a high proportion of new ventures fail in the first year (and half fail within five years). This is why many first-time entrepreneurs only take the plunge mid-career, having built knowledge, experience and a network of contacts through their 20s and 30s.

Hone your persuasion skills. This often comes down to being a good storyteller. Whether it's applying for a job, or motivating people to join your team, many important decisions are made through compelling stories. Being a good listener is equally important – to be able to mirror back people's desires in ways that align with yours.

Sultan Murad Saidov, Co-founder, Beamery

Next steps

EnSpire Oxford: www.eship.ox.ac.uk

Spin-outs and business support

Oxford University Innovation: www.innovation.ox.ac.uk

Begbroke Science Park: www.begbroke.ox.ac.uk

Oxfordshire Social Entrepreneurs Partnership (OSEP): www.osep.org.uk

OxLEP Business: www.oxfordshirelep.com/business

Alumni profile

Danny Parrott and Richard Lloyd



What: We run a travel and education social enterprise together called Gotoco; linking university students with funded education sector internships around the world.

How/career path: We met studying Chinese and cemented our friendship and interest in China during our year abroad in Beijing in 2012. Oxford Summer Internship funding allowed us to return to China and teach English on summer camps during our university holidays, and Gotoco was soon born. After graduating in 2015, we were keen to explore options that would bring us back to China. Through Oxford, Danny arranged funding to do an MBA at Tsinghua University and Richard joined a policy research advisory in Beijing, working principally with the EU, UN and embassies in China.

Danny's tip: While studying is an important part of the Oxford experience, you really shouldn't miss out on the truly unique and diverse world of opportunities on offer here.

One of the highlights of my time at Oxford was the summer internship programme. There is nothing quite like it anywhere in the world.

Richard's tip: I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do after university, except that I wanted to use my Mandarin and didn't want to go straight into a corporate role. An internship grant in my final year allowed me to spend my summer teaching in China. This led me to founding my own social enterprise, Gotoco, with my two best friends.

Position

Co-founders, Gotoco TEFL Adventures.

Background

BA Oriental Studies (Chinese and Tibetan), Pembroke College, 2015 (Richard); BA Oriental Studies (Chinese and Modern Chinese Literature), St Anne's College, 2015 (Danny).

Alumni profile

Ana Sousa Geros



What: I've always aimed to make a positive impact through my career. Initially, I saw an academic career as the ideal path, yet my perspective shifted during my final year of DPhil. I decided to explore other opportunities and immerse myself in different Oxford societies and events. This exploration led to the founding of DŌSOJIN, a startup aimed at making travel safer by leveraging AI and machine learning.

Why: Driven by curiosity in innovation and social enterprising, I joined both the Careers Service's FLIP and EnSpire's All Innovate programmes. DŌSOJIN was born "accidentally" during All Innovate. Initially, our group was pursuing a biotech idea. However, after a night of worrying about a friend's safety on a distant date, the thought of AI-powered technology which would ensure users' safety – and perception of safety – came to my mind. We fell in love with the idea and its social impact, so we created a new business plan and successfully pitched it in the All Innovate closing event. We then secured a place in the OVB programme, gaining invaluable mentorship, training, and networking opportunities through their very thorough workshops.

Evolution: We developed our business model in the first six months while juggling research and personal affairs, which was very intensive. We won some small awards – two £500 and two £1000 prizes – and 'podiumed' at EnSpire Oxford's Started in Oxford Demo Night. I'll complete my DPhil early in 2025 while continuing to build DŌSOJIN. We were fortunate enough to be selected by Sterling Road for their in-house training, which focuses on start-up launch development.

Advice: I never thought this path was for me, but nothing is impossible if you're willing to understand it. It's all about dreaming and then persevering. Your commitment, resilience, and creativity will make all the difference, every step of the way. Plus, there's an amazing community ready to encourage and guide you.

Position

Co-Founder, DŌSOJIN.

Background

DPhil Clinical Medicine, St Peter's College, 2025.