



OILSCOIL NA  
GAILLIMHE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF GALWAY

Mol Smaointe  
IdeasLab

# IdeasLab

## Impact Report 2024



# Foreword



Innovation and entrepreneurship are fundamental to our mission at University of Galway and this report highlights the transformative impact IdeasLab has had in fostering these values across our University and the region.

Since its inception, IdeasLab has become a dynamic hub that propels innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking within our community. In alignment with our commitment to distinctive research and excellence in education, IdeasLab empowers our students to develop a global outlook, tackle complex challenges, and drive forward new ideas in partnership with enterprise.

As a University community, through the development of our new University Strategic Plan, we are renewing our focus on teaching, education, research and innovation, that are both excellent and impactful. IdeasLab has been an outstanding example of our evolution toward this vision. Our commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship can be seen in the President's Award for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and students who have participated in IdeasLab's programmes have been recipients of this award.

Through IdeasLab, we create invaluable opportunities for students to develop ventures, engage in real-world problem-solving, and grow as part of a community dedicated to making a difference across our society.

The influence of IdeasLab extends beyond our University, contributing to regional and national growth. Through its support of startups, partnerships with enterprise, and commitment to student success, IdeasLab stands as a testament to University of Galway's mission to empower talent and generate global impact. Together, we are creating a future where innovation and entrepreneurship are cornerstones of a sustainable and inclusive world.

Professor Peter McHugh  
Uachtarán Eatramhach - Interim President



As we celebrate four years of IdeasLab at University of Galway, it is heartening to reflect on how far we've come. When we launched in 2020, the world faced the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a time of uncertainty, but it also highlighted the critical importance of innovation, adaptability, and resilience - values that are central to IdeasLab.

What began as a small, ambitious initiative with just two team members has since grown into a vibrant, dynamic community. Today, our team has expanded to six dedicated members who support a thriving ecosystem of students, staff, and enterprise partners. Together, we've built a space where creativity, collaboration, and experimentation are at the heart of everything we do.

Since our inception, IdeasLab has evolved into the central hub of innovation at the University, empowering over 1,000 students annually and collaborating with 47 enterprise partners. We have supported the development of students and their new ideas, startups, and real-world solutions that address society's most pressing challenges. Our growth and impact have been recognised through four prestigious awards, affirming our commitment to excellence.

Our dedication to fostering multidisciplinary collaboration, diversity, and inclusion remains unwavering. We are proud to have shaped the future careers of so many talented students. As we continue to drive innovation and entrepreneurship across the University and beyond, we invite you to join us in shaping the future. Whether you are a student with a bold idea, an enterprise partner seeking collaboration, or a supporter of transformative education, IdeasLab provides an inspiring space to make real impact. Together, we can empower the next generation of changemakers and create a brighter future for all.

Dr Natalie Walsh  
Director of Entrepreneurial Development

**FUELLING**  
**CREATIVITY,**  
**IDEAS AND**  
**INNOVATION**



# Our Story So Far

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a red turtleneck, a black jacket, and black boots, is painting on a wooden easel in a city street at night. She is holding a paint palette and a brush. Above her head is a white outline of a lightbulb with a small sketch inside, connected to the easel by a white line. The background shows a street with buildings, string lights, and a flag.

IdeasLab started as a team of just two during the challenging period of COVID-19. Guided by our mission to foster innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking, IdeasLab launched its first initiative, the Enterprise Challenge, in October 2020 with Boston Scientific. This was followed by an internship programme in early 2021, and, by 2022, Start100, our incubator programme, began transforming student ideas into startups, contributing to job creation and entrepreneurial growth. In 2023, we expanded further by introducing CreateHER, a female-focused pre-incubator, and the Stanford Innovation Fellows programme, strengthening our connections in global innovation.

Today, IdeasLab with a team of six, stands as a vibrant, inclusive hub for innovation and creativity, connecting students across disciplines and supporting entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills development. By extending our programmes to second-level students, we foster the next generation of entrepreneurial thinkers.

We envision IdeasLab as a centre of excellence for entrepreneurial education, training and research, not only at University of Galway, but setting a standard that educational institutions worldwide aspire to. In 2025, we will launch the *Future Skills Observatory* and a *Mobile Empathy Studio*, broadening our reach and providing immersive, empathy-driven learning experiences. Collaborating closely with enterprise, IdeasLab will continue to equip students with essential skills for a rapidly evolving workforce. Join us on this exciting journey toward creating global impact through innovation and entrepreneurship.



# October 2020

Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 Funding



1st IdeasLab Programme Enterprise Challenge

A team of 2

IdeasLab space in the heart of campus

A team of 4

9 Enterprise Partners!



1st Female-focused Pre-Incubator CreateHER

UIIN Entrepreneurship at Universities Award

1st Student Incubator in the West of Ireland Start100

A team of 5



ENLIGHT Teaching & Learning Award

Empathy Studio Launch

Galway Chamber Business Award Excellence In Innovation



1st Immersive Empathy Workshop

1st Programme with Enterprise Partner Employees

1st IdeasLab Hack Supporting Sustainable Growth in Galway

Inaugural President's Award for Entrepreneurship & Innovation



A team of 6

ACEEU Emerging Innovation and Entrepreneurship Activators of the Year Award

Impact Report Launch



# November 2024

47 Enterprise Partners!



Aerogen Enterprise Challenge Winners 2022 - Karthick Vishal A., Mohammad Albaroudi, Clara Costea, and Ankita Bhardwaj

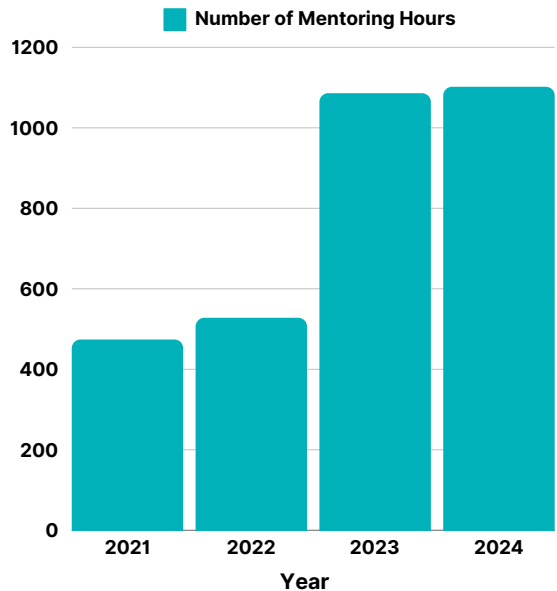
## Enterprise Partnership

A key enabler of IdeasLab's success lies in our active and expanding engagement with enterprise partners across diverse sectors, including technology, MedTech, corporate services, insurance, regulated industries, and creative fields. We have developed significant collaborations that offer students unique opportunities to solve real-world challenges in tandem with enterprise experts.

Through mentoring, site visits, shadowing days, and interactive workshops, our students gain invaluable, hands-on experience, bridging their academic learning with dynamic business environments. As IdeasLab continues to grow, we remain committed to deepening these enterprise partnerships.

While some IdeasLab students may launch their own companies, others will excel as 'intrapreneurs,' leveraging entrepreneurial skills within established organisations. Our intrapreneurship-focused programmes ensure our students are equipped with skills to lead, innovate, and shape the industries of tomorrow, directly supporting the University's mission to prepare future-ready graduates for a complex world.

## Enterprise and Student Mentoring



**3190**

Mentoring hours from Enterprise to Students 2021-2024

**47**

Enterprises currently engaged with IdeasLab



**Sinéad Renouf**

**Senior Global Strategic Marketing Manager  
Aerogen**

“Aerogen have been partnered with the idealabs for many years now, It is always such a great pleasure to connect with students at the University, foster the creativity, ideation and development of each student. Being a mentor from the start this year and seeing the progression, development and confidence over the weeks is a wonderful opportunity.”

**Anne Grealish**

**Senior Strategy Program Manager  
Medtronic**

“Our collaboration with the University of Galway IdeasLab on initiatives from senior leader workshops to a grand challenge has been immensely enriching. Working alongside students and the IdeasLab team provided a dynamic environment to explore innovative solutions to real-world challenges. This partnership highlights the significant potential of industry-academic collaboration.”

**Richard Crawford**

**Process Development Manager  
Boston Scientific**

“Here at Boston Scientific, we collaborate with the University to mentor students and offer our experience in developing innovative solutions to unmet needs. IdeasLab allows students to gain real life experience which will result in the University producing a talent pool of people who have the necessary skillsets to seamlessly transition into the workplace. It has been our pleasure to participate in this program and we look forward to further collaboration with IdeasLab and seeing the next generation of superstars come through.”

**Sarah Caplice**

**Senior Brand Manager  
Diligent**

“Our collaboration with IdeasLab, especially through the CreateHER initiative and the Enterprise Challenge, has been incredibly valuable for Diligent. Engaging with students has fostered a culture of learning and mutual growth within our team. The mentorship experience has allowed us to exchange insights, learn from fresh perspectives, and inspire both our team members and the students involved. IdeasLab’s dedication to nurturing talent and driving innovation makes them an exceptional partner in our shared mission to create meaningful industry impact.”

**Ben Steele**

**Director of Architecture and Galway Chair  
Liberty IT**

“Partnering with IdeasLabs, the University of Galway’s innovation hub, has been a transformative experience for our people. Through initiatives like the Enterprise Challenge, CreateHer program, and a co-hosted hackathon, their professional, product-focused team has inspired fresh perspectives and innovative thinking. Working with them has been not only productive but also incredibly enjoyable. Highly recommended!”





I started college at 17, studying computer science but I wasn't enjoying my course and ended up dropping out. I worked for a while, thinking I'd save up and start a business. One day I was in Galway and happened to walk through the campus and saw IdeasLab. It caught my eye, and I kept thinking about it. Eventually, I decided to go back to college and see if I could make things work this time. So, I applied through the CAO and got accepted. When the applications opened for Start100, I applied with my company and got invited to pitch. From there, things started to turn around for me. I've made valuable connections and feel supported in both my studies and my business. Participating in IdeasLab programmes has made a huge difference, helping me combine my academic work with what I'm doing in business.

Before becoming involved with Ideaslab, I struggled with a sense of belonging. I never really felt connected to my last college, but the programmes here have changed that. I feel like I matter and that I can contribute something. Public speaking was a big challenge for me, but through Start100 and the IdeasLab Ambassador programme, I've gotten a lot better at it. I've also met people with similar mindsets and made connections I never thought I would.

**“I never really felt connected to my last college, but the programmes here have changed that. I feel like I matter and that I can contribute something.”**

**Ethan O'Brien**  
**Electronic & Computer Engineering**  
**College of Science and Engineering**



Moving to start university in Galway was one of the hardest transitions of my life. I asked myself: What type of person do I want to be? And what does it take to get there? I didn't have the answers, and that uncertainty weighed on me. Everything changed when I stumbled across CreateHER, IdeasLab's programme designed to foster female leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship. From the first day, I felt like I had found my people - women from different fields but with a shared passion for learning and growth. CreateHER was my turning point, helping me develop communication skills and resilience. With the confidence I gained, I applied for the Start100 programme. I walked in with doubts - was I capable? Would I be able to pitch in front of others? However, IdeasLab quickly helped me overcome those fears.

My idea was Stepwise, a smart insole designed to tackle plantar fasciitis by measuring biomechanics and transmitting real-time data to practitioners. People approached me after the final to share their own experiences with the condition, and it hit me - I wasn't just pitching an idea, I was offering a solution to a real problem.

**“I started this journey asking myself, “What kind of person do I want to be?” and “What does it take to get there?”**

**Through IdeasLab, I've found my answers. I want to be a creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial individual, continually growing and making an impact on others.”**



Claudine Mulihamo  
Podiatric Medicine  
College of Medicine, Nursing  
and Health Sciences

# Driving Regional Impact and Entrepreneurship

Employment impact assessment for Start100, the first multidisciplinary early-stage student incubator programme in the West of Ireland.

Figures based on 45 Start100 alumni to date.

**7** Businesses active and trading

**60** Employed (directly and indirectly)

**63%** employed in Galway

**5** High-tech or highly skilled tradable businesses



1. **Business in Ireland 2021 – Detailed Results**  
[cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-biir/biir/businessinireland2021detailedresults/businessperformanceinireland/](https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-biir/biir/businessinireland2021detailedresults/businessperformanceinireland/)





Of the 45 participants to date who have completed Start100, 15 are still completing their studies. Seven businesses were created and are currently active employing 29 directly.

Start100 incubated businesses have led to 38 employed directly in the Galway region, and 22 employed elsewhere including counties Cork, Meath, Laois, Offaly and Tipperary.

Five of these businesses are in high-tech or highly skilled tradable businesses which typically experience more rapid growth scaling.

# €2.88m

Gross economic value  
from jobs created<sup>1</sup>

# 22

Jobs beyond Galway

# 38

Jobs in Galway region

**Source:** Toolkit: Multiplier Effects. What Works Centre for Economic Growth. <https://whatworksgrowth.org/resource-library/toolkit-local-multipliers>

List of tradable industries available here: [https://whatworksgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/Comparing\\_Toolkit\\_with\\_ONS\\_Multipliers.pdf](https://whatworksgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/Comparing_Toolkit_with_ONS_Multipliers.pdf)

Note: Brady (2019) calculated a multiplier of 3 for IDA-backed FDI businesses.

Brady, G. (2019). Local Multipliers: IDA Supported Companies in the Irish Regions. The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp.341-367.



**Sarah Jane Hughes**  
**Electronic & Computer Engineering**  
**College of Science and Engineering**

Before coming to college, I felt like a leader in all aspects of my life. But when I started university, I immediately felt like just 1 of 20,000 students, 1 of 300 engineers, just an ordinary person. I saw a post for IdeasLab's CreateHER programme and thought it would be an opportunity to talk to someone and say I AM ambitious, I AM hardworking, I AM driven, I KNOW I can make the world we live in a better place. CreateHER gave me my spark back. It made me feel special again, like I was doing something bigger than myself. I was amongst people who encouraged curiosity, who didn't call me crazy when I said I wanted to change the world, who let me be myself. I found a sense of belonging in IdeasLab. They gave me the confidence to look out for more opportunities to embrace innovation and seek solutions all around me. I felt like a leader again. I always get told I ask far too many questions but in CreateHER I had an opportunity to ask as many questions as I had and be celebrated for that, not judged.

**“CreateHER gave me my spark back. It made me feel special again, like I was doing something bigger than myself. I was amongst people who encouraged curiosity, who didn't call me crazy when I said I wanted to change the world, who let me be myself.”**



I first discovered IdeasLab through a post on Instagram. Until then, I'd only known it as the room with the cool LED lights, but I soon found it to be a place of true enlightenment. Last summer, I completed the Start100 programme, which reshaped my college experience in ways I hadn't expected.

During my first year, I felt like just another number. IdeasLab changed that, giving me a sense of community and helping me connect with people across the university. The Start100 programme wasn't easy, and some days were tougher than others, but I always felt supported by the team - a support that continues beyond the programme.

My biggest challenge? Imposter syndrome. As a first-year among mostly older students, many of them final-year, I often felt out of place. A conversation with Natalie Walsh, the Director of Entrepreneurial Development, changed that. She reminded me I deserved my place just as much as anyone. Her words gave me the confidence to push through.

IdeasLab didn't just help me grow - it put me on the map. Since the programme, I've been recognised and invited to contribute to projects across the university, from student testimonials to representing my college in Dublin. Their influence continues to light the way, connecting me to opportunities I hadn't imagined.

**“IdeasLab didn't just help me grow - it put me on the map.”**



**Damien Delaney**  
**Psychology**  
**College of Arts, Social**  
**Science and Celtic Studies**





President's Award for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Recipients 2024

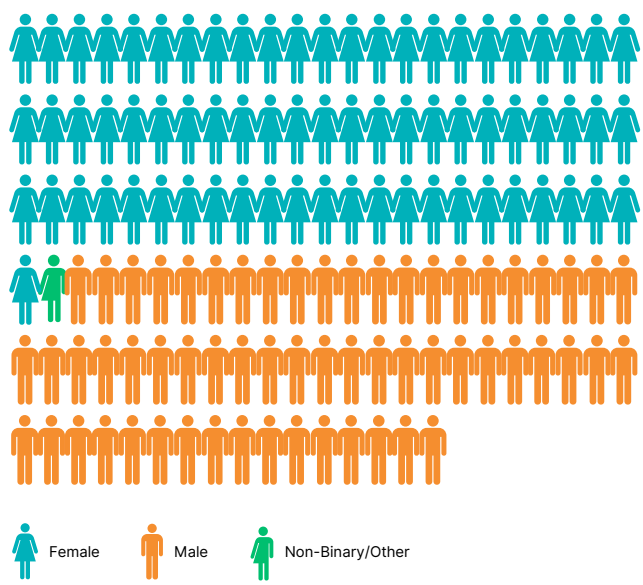
## The President's Award for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Earlier this year, we proudly launched the President's Awards for Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship, celebrating students who demonstrate exceptional commitment to developing their skills beyond their degree. The award is structured to recognise different levels of achievement, with students working towards bronze, silver, and gold awards.

These levels reflect increasing dedication and accomplishment in fostering innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurial thinking. Since its launch, the awards have had a significant impact on students, encouraging them to actively apply their knowledge in real-world contexts and empowering them to take initiative in developing entrepreneurial ventures. Many participants have not only enhanced their problem-solving and leadership skills but have also gained greater confidence.

Our awards emphasise the value of co-curricular efforts, highlighting the importance of applying learned skills in real-world contexts, and empowering students to actively shape their futures through innovation and enterprise.

**131** Recipients of the President's Award for Innovation & Entrepreneurship in **2024**.



**23** Gold award recipients  
Completed Start100 or three IdeasLab Programmes

**13** Silver award recipients  
Completed two IdeasLab Programmes

**95** Bronze award recipients  
Completed one IdeasLab Programme





Ciarán Cox, Mia Shanley Brookes, and Sophie Spellissy

## Stanford University Innovation Fellowship

In 2023, IdeasLab became the first Irish Higher Education Institution to join the Stanford University Innovation Fellowship (UIF), offering students access to a world-renowned innovation community. This programme immerses students in a global network, refining their leadership, creativity, and resilience skills, while connecting them with like-minded changemakers.

Looking forward, two of our team members are participating in the Stanford Faculty Innovation Fellowship, graduating in Spring 2025, bringing back advanced insights from this international experience to enrich IdeasLab's programmes. Through Stanford's extensive network and resources, IdeasLab provides students with distinctive opportunities to engage with leading-edge innovation practices, reinforcing University of Galway's position as a leader in Ireland's entrepreneurial landscape and preparing students to excel in a globalised world.

"The UIF programme was a valuable experience that highlighted the importance of teamwork and effective communication. Navigating meetings and coordinating tasks underscored the need for strong time management and organisational skills. This collaborative effort strengthened my abilities and fostered meaningful relationships with my peers as we journeyed on campus and internationally to inspire change for the better." **Ciarán Cox, Biomedical Engineering, College of Science and Engineering**

## Séamus McDermott Scholarship

Funded through the Liffey Trust, the scholarship supports students who are committed to developing their innovative and entrepreneurial potential. The scholarship is managed through IdeasLab and is open to first year students with €9,000 funding available during the course of their studies if they are the selected candidate for the scholarship.



Elizabeth Busari  
2024 Recipient  
Business Information  
Systems  
College of Business,  
Public Policy and Law





Start100 2024

## Our Global Projects

IdeasLab's engagement in EU projects offers students unparalleled opportunities to participate in European programmes and gain valuable mobility experience. Through initiatives like EIT Health's SCI FI, a health and pharma innovation programme addressing real-life challenges; I-Days, which encourages students to create solutions for pressing health issues; and the Women Entrepreneurship Bootcamp, which has collectively helped participants raise over €37 million in funding, IdeasLab equips students and early-stage innovators with critical skills in entrepreneurship, teamwork, and resilience. In 2023 the University of Galway team won first prize at the i-Days final in Barcelona.

Our success in the EIT HEI Initiative demonstrates our dedication to expanding educational impact and aligning with the University's mission to build capacity and empower students to take on global challenges.

Collaborating with an EU consortium that included members of the ENLIGHT European University Alliance on the i2i project, we focus on developing capacity for complex problem-solving, connecting our students to Europe's broader innovation ecosystem. These initiatives foster cultural exchange, enhance professional networks, and expand future career opportunities, supporting the University's vision to create global impact through distinctive research and transformative student experiences.



i-Days University of Galway Winners 2024

Congratulations to our EIT Health i-Days winning team Tremorfix: Xiao Yu Liu, Dearbhla Smith, Ashlyn Reona Rodrigues and Esha Jobby.

Six teams at University of Galway presented their innovative solutions to various health challenges. The winning team, Tremorfix, came up with a wearable glove-like device designed to help manage tremors associated with Parkinson's Disease.

Tremorfix will now go on to represent University of Galway at the i-Days 2024 Final in Budapest!





Riona Cassidy, Jack Mitchell and Ellie Smith

## Empathy Studio

Our Empathy Studio is an innovative environment dedicated to cultivating empathy as a practical and transformative skill. At its core, the studio offers immersive experiences designed to support students to “walk in the shoes” of others. Through carefully crafted workshops and interactive experiences including virtual reality, soundscapes and role plays our students engage in exercises that simulate real-world challenges. This experiential learning approach allows students to grasp the complexities of these challenges beyond a theoretical level, promoting a mindset of empathy that influences their problem-solving and creativity.

Central to the Empathy Studio’s method is the use of the EntreComp framework, ensuring empathy is fostered as a practiced skill with clear competencies relevant to both professional and personal contexts. By partnering with international institutions such as Penn State and our own Institute for Lifecourse and Society, we continually enhance our resources, setting IdeasLab’s Empathy Studio as a leading model for empathy-driven education and creating lasting, positive impacts on the way students approach innovation and societal challenges.

## Programmes for Enterprise and University Staff

Recognising the valuable skills and innovative mindset cultivated within our students, enterprise partners and the University staff community have shown strong interest in IdeasLab’s programmes. Responding to this demand, we expanded our offerings to support skill-building and creative problem-solving among both industry and academic staff.

Today, we provide tailored programmes that empower employees and enterprise professionals to develop entrepreneurial skills, foster resilience, and drive innovation within their roles.

In addition to these programmes, IdeasLab delivers eight academic modules in collaboration with University faculty and hosts over 30 guest lectures annually, embedding entrepreneurship and innovation throughout our institution.

These initiatives prepare our community to lead with creativity and agility, reinforcing the University’s mission to provide a transformative education and expand our impact locally and globally.

**TRAINING**

**TOMORROW'S**

**INNOVATORS,**

**TODAY**





Jenny Mullery, Anna Ní Fhlatharta, Andrea Fassbender, Natalie Walsh, Caoimhe Walsh, and Neil Ferguson

## Our Team

Our team brings over 50 years of combined experience in creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. With multidisciplinary backgrounds, we are committed to empowering students, staff, and enterprise partners to develop future-ready skills. Aligned with the University's vision, we drive meaningful impact through transformative education, fostering resilience, adaptability, and creative problem-solving for a dynamic world.

We are deeply appreciative of the awards recognising IdeasLab's commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship. These achievements are crucial in supporting our ambition to be globally recognised for excellence, inspiring us to continue advancing entrepreneurial education and innovative practices that resonate within and beyond our institution.

## Recognition of Excellence by



## Our Mission

At IdeasLab, we ignite the potential within each student to become bold, empathetic problem-solvers, innovators and leaders. Through immersive experiences, multidisciplinary collaboration, and enterprise partnerships, we cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets that drive meaningful change in society. We empower students to become the innovators of tomorrow, leading with purpose and creating solutions that shape a better future for all.

## Our Vision

To be a catalyst for transformative change, empowering the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs to shape the future through creativity, collaboration, empathy, and impact-driven solutions.



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