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Growing the next generation of North East movers and shakers at Northumbria

University, Newcastle.

From Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to perfumery pioneer Jo Malone; who began making perfumes with flowers from her garden at just nine-years-old, entrepreneurship is a skill that can be successfully harnessed from a young age.

And to ensure the next generation of movers and shakers are fully equipped for the highs and lows that will inevitably come with launching their own business, Northumbria University, Newcastle, has developed the perfect platform.

A 10-week course, called SPARKTANK, is new to the North East and has recently been nurturing 11 budding entrepreneurs who want their business ideas to become a reality.

Sponsored by Newcastle Business School, at Northumbria, and Gateshead Council, the free business start-up accelerator has proven popular with people who have just graduated and are keen to make it in the business world.

Based at Baltimore House, in Gateshead's Baltic Business Quarter, the pilot programme has been designed to support, develop and test business ideas.

As well as providing graduates with mentors and specialist input from already seasoned entrepreneurs, the first seven applicants were given grants of £1,000 by Gateshead Council towards living costs while on the programme.

The ten-week programme has seen the entrepreneurs pitching their ideas to invited guests from the business world at weekly "pizza and pitch" evenings. They have practised a wide range of pitches from the one-minute overview to a full pitch to investors.

One of the businesses, due to be launched in January, is "Festibl." – a social network for music festival fans. Founded by 27-year-old Danielle Young, an avid traveller from Blyth, Northumberland, with a passion for live music, Festibl aims to encourage and enable music fans to go to the festivals that they want to attend, without having to rely on their immediate friends – whose priorities or tastes may be quite different.

Danielle has teamed up with business partner and fellow Northumbria graduate Sam Clegg, 27, and the pair strongly believe that there is a gap in the market for a festival social network.

Sam said: "For millions of people, music festivals represent the highlight of the year. But so many people miss out because they have nobody to go with. If someone wants to go to a festival but their friends aren't up for it,

the likelihood is that they won't go. This means that they miss out on the fun and festivals miss out on ticket sales.

"By matching people based on their music tastes and the festivals they want to attend, Festibl. enables likeminded people to meet and share amazing festival experiences that they are currently missing out on."

Danielle added: "With more than 700 festivals in the UK alone, the market is increasingly saturated and only the big players actually sell out early and reach their full capacity.

Festibl will provide a unique platform for festival organisers to connect with a highly targeted and receptive audience, who are actively seeking to go to more music festivals, ultimately increasing ticket sales."

A keen festival fan with a background in design and marketing, Danielle played an integral role in the creation of this year's Lindisfarne Festival, in North Northumberland, which landed nominations for three UK Festival Awards in its inaugural year.

Meanwhile, 22-year-old Toby Pease from Corbridge, Northumberland, has launched North East Adventure Camps for children aged 9-15. Toby developed his enthusiasm for the outdoors during a year in the Australian Outback, organising activities for children in rock-climbing, sailing, sea-kayaking and more.

Using this experience, he set up a series of residential adventure camps for children, with the first camp taking place during the 2016 Easter School Holidays at Mowden Hall, near Stocksfield.

Toby said: "There are some recent statistics that show children in the UK spend an average of six and a half hours per day glued to a screen. These activities are about getting children away from their computers and playing outdoors again.

"SPARKTANK has given me all the skills I need to start my business with limited funding. Having experts on hand to help build my website has been invaluable. The mentors have given me the confidence to go out and talk to customers and they in-turn have given me important feedback.

"It's also taken the loneliness out of starting your own business. Instead, I've been in an environment where I can bounce ideas off other like-minded people and draw upon the skills of others to help launch my business successfully.

"Recently, I've been recruiting other instructors to work with me on the Easter camps. The experience of meeting other young, enthusiastic people who share a passion for childcare in an outdoors, adventurous setting has really taken the business to the next level."

SPARTTANK Director and Enterprise Fellow at Newcastle Business School, Michael Fowle, believes accelerator projects like SPARKTANK can benefit economic regeneration in the future.

He said: "Our entrepreneurs come to us with drive and ideas. We supply office space, a little bit of structure and relentless pressure to engage with customers. We also introduce them to dynamic local business people who have experience, skills and inspiring stories to share.

"The success of this pilot is due largely to the extraordinary work of the team. All team members are entrepreneurs in their own right and have been business owners or founders.

"The SPARKTANK pilot results have been impressive. I am really excited about the prospects for the entrepreneurs who test-drove this pilot project and also about the potential for programmes like this to make a difference in the North East."

Lucy Winskell, OBE, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business & Engagement at Northumbria added: "Encouraging enterprise and entrepreneurship is a fundamental part of the Northumbria experience. It is an approach that continues to bring considerable success and opportunity.

"Indeed, we are recognised as the number one university in the UK for graduate start-ups based on turnover, and have supported the development of more than 100 graduate companies since 2009 – businesses that now employ almost 950 staff and have a combined turnover of £62.2 million. Not only is this really important to our students and graduates, but also to the economy of the North East."

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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