

# Aspect

## University partnerships with Zinc ventures

Rachel Carey

August 2021



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## Zinc Mission 1 venture **Parla** has worked with researchers and medical students at Imperial College, as well as with researchers from UCL.

<b>Hello! Who are you and what do you do?</b>	Lina Chan, CEO and Co-founder of <b>Parla</b> . We are an expert-led community tackling women's reproductive health issues including PCOS, infertility and miscarriage.
<b>Which researcher(s) did you work with?</b>	<p>We've worked with a number of researchers, including on a project run in collaboration with a researcher at UCL. We're currently working with a researcher who was previously at Cambridge University.</p> <p>Although we haven't run a formal research project with them, we're also advised by doctors at Imperial College London NHS Trust and medical students from Imperial College London produce some of the content for Parla.</p>
<b>How long did you work together</b>	We worked with UCL in 2019 and with our Imperial College advisors from 2018 to 2020. Our work on content with medical students from Imperial started in 2020 and is ongoing.
<b>How did you find your partner(s)?</b>	We found our partners in different of ways. Our connection with the Imperial College NHS Trust is via a personal friend but we recruit medical students through the Parla community. Our partnership with UCL came about via Zinc.
<b>(How) was your partnership supported?</b>	The research project with UCL was funded by Zinc and the Wellcome Trust. Our current work with a researcher is also funded by the Wellcome Trust as part of a programme of research-in-ventures, looking at ways to engage people around 'taboo' health issues.
<b>What did you do together?</b>	<p>With UCL, we looked at the impact that the Parla app can have on the emotional wellbeing of users. We specifically evaluated its effects on perceived levels of support, knowledge and stress.</p> <p>Our current research as part of the Wellcome-funded 'Taboos' project is looking particularly at how we can improve the care provided to women who experience miscarriage.</p>
<b>What did your partnership do for you?</b>	Our research partners played a key role in helping us scope and analyse the findings of each research project. We implemented our learnings in improvements to enhance both engagement with and the effectiveness of our product.
<b>What do you think your partner(s) got out of it?</b>	They were excited to work with a start-up that was able to iterate quickly and implement the learnings of the research into the project effectively and efficiently.
<b>Why is working with universities important to you?</b>	We want Parla to be grounded in science; we also want to build IP through research. Working with researchers / universities helps with credibility but also helps maximise the beneficial impacts of our product.
<b>What are your top tips for other ventures and researchers thinking about working together?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be clear about your scope and goals.</li> <li>• Work closely with research partners in designing the study, learning and tweaking things as you go.</li> <li>• The more frequent check-ins and feedback you get, the better the outcome.</li> </ul>
<b>Are you looking for more university partners to work with in future?</b>	Yes, definitely. We are very excited about the research we are doing now around the 'taboo' topic of miscarriage. We think there is a huge opportunity for more research in this area to really improve care for this user group.

## Bold health is a Zinc Mission 1 venture. They've worked with the University of Pennsylvania, including on an RCT of their first product for IBS sufferers.

<b>Hello! Who are you and what do you do?</b>	Dr Jossy Onuwde, CPO and Co-founder, and Nessrin Younes, Behavioural Scientist at <a href="#">Bold Health</a> . We provide digital solutions for GI conditions.
<b>Which researcher(s) did you work with?</b>	We've worked the University of Pennsylvania (UPENN), and particularly with <a href="#">Dr Melissa Hunt</a> in the Department of Psychology
<b>How long did you work together</b>	We've worked with UPENN since Bold Health was founded.
<b>How did you find your partner(s)?</b>	It's varied: we found some of our partners through cold outreach to academics who have done research around our areas of interest. Others we found through our personal networks, especially Jossy's as a medical doctor with previous research and analytic experience.
<b>(How) was your partnership supported?</b>	We've used some private funding to support our partnership with UPENN. Some aspects of the work have also been supported by Innovate UK.
<b>What did you do together?</b>	<p>The major piece of work we've done together has been running and publishing a successful 120-person Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) with Dr Hunt. The study investigated the efficacy of our first product, Zemedly, which provides app-based accessible, personalised care for IBS, using CBT techniques to not just manage symptoms but treat them long term.</p> <p>Our results met all primary and secondary outcomes, meaning we saw clinically significant improvements on all measures. Those included: gastrointestinal symptom severity; health-related quality of life; GI symptom-specific anxiety; and depressive symptoms.</p>
<b>What did your partnership do for you?</b>	Outside of our publication, Zemedly's comprehensive CBT-based programme was developed by Dr Melissa Hunt from the University of Pennsylvania - where she has herself investigated the efficacy for the self-help interventions in IBS for over 10 years.
<b>What do you think your partner(s) got out of it?</b>	Access to engagement data set, a new publication and opportunity to research an innovative solution
<b>Were there any project outputs?</b>	Findings from the UPENN research on Zemedly's effectiveness are published in <i>JMIR mHealth uHealth</i> <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>Why is working with universities important to you?</b>	<p>Through our work with universities, we have been able to work with experts in the field who have advised and supported us in creating our products and ensuring they are of the highest therapeutic standards.</p> <p>Our academic partners also have different networks from us. That means that, when they talk about us and our product, that message reaches different people.</p> <p>Importantly, partnerships with reputable clinicians and researchers also adds to our credibility and allows us to more confidently promote our products.</p>

<p><b>What are your top tips for other ventures and researchers thinking about working together?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be clear about your scope and goals.</li> <li>• Work closely with research partners in designing the study, learning and tweaking things as you go.</li> <li>• The more frequent check-ins and feedback you get, the better the outcome.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are you looking for more university partners to work with in future?</b></p>	<p>We are keen to work with university partners interested in developing and testing digital interventions. We can be reached via <a href="mailto:hello@bold.health">hello@bold.health</a></p>

## Zinc Mission 2 venture **Tandem** partnered with the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow on a project to survey and model user preferences for new transport models in towns and small cities.

<p><b>Hello! Who are you and what do you do?</b></p>	<p>Tatseng Chiam, Chief Operating Officer of <b>Tandem</b>. Our mission is to build the future of mobility outside of big cities. We offer a new low-cost alternative to private transport through flexible, tech-enabled partnerships with local taxi, minibus and coach companies.</p>
<p><b>Which researcher(s) did you work with?</b></p>	<p>We worked with Dr <b>Caitlin Cottrill</b> at the Centre for Transport Research at Aberdeen University. We also worked with two researchers at the University of Glasgow - Dr <b>Wee Meng Yeo</b> at the Adam Smith Business School and Dr <b>Tom Wallis</b>, at the School of Computing Science.</p>
<p><b>How long did you work together?</b></p>	<p>Tandem and the universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow worked together between March 2020 and January 2021.</p>
<p><b>How did you find your partner(s)?</b></p>	<p>We went out and looked for universities with relevant expertise in transportation and got in touch with them ourselves, to invite them to bid with us for some funding for a collaborative project. We thought the combined, complementary expertise at Aberdeen and Glasgow was perfect for us and formed a three-way collaboration with both universities.</p>
<p><b>(How) was your partnership supported?</b></p>	<p>Our partnership was generously supported by the <b>ASPECT network</b>.</p>
<p><b>What did you do together?</b></p>	<p>Caitlin (University of Aberdeen) carried out extensive qualitative user research, while Wee Meng and Tom (University of Glasgow) developed a simulation pricing tool.</p>
<p><b>What did your partnership do for you?</b></p>	<p>Our work with Aberdeen and Glasgow has enhanced our understanding of certain important user segments. This has provided really useful insights as Tandem start to widen our scope beyond blue-collar worker transport to support broader demographics in different situations.</p>
<p><b>What do you think your partner(s) got out of it?</b></p>	<p>Our partners were able to collaborate with a start-up, which isn't all that typical a partnership for most researchers. The work we did together should underpin the development of a new academic publication at some point in the next 12 months.</p>

<b>Were there any project outputs?</b>	Yes, we produced a final project report which you can see here.
<b>Was this the first time you'd worked with a university?</b>	Yes
<b>Why is working with universities important to you?</b>	We think it's good to get a fresh set of inputs and perspectives from a stakeholder group that's quite different from either our private sector investors or customers.
<b>What are your top tips for other ventures and researchers thinking about working together?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over-estimate timelines, especially in any contracting stages!</li> </ul> <p>It took quite a bit longer than we expected to finalise contracts. Our academic partners did what they could to nudge that along as quickly as possible, but universities can certainly involve more process flows than normal operating procedures within a start-up.</p>
<b>Are you looking for more university partners to work with in future?</b>	We don't have any immediate collaboration opportunities open but would be keen to work with university researchers again in the future and happy to receive any research-related ideas via <a href="mailto:tatseng@ridetandem.co.uk">tatseng@ridetandem.co.uk</a>

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## Mission 2 venture **BelleVie** has with Sheffield University in developing their new service to help older and vulnerable adults to thrive at home.

<b>Hello! Who are you and what do you do?</b>	<b>Dr Trudie Fell</b> , CEO and Co-founder of <b>BelleVie</b> . BelleVie supports older and vulnerable adults to thrive at home.
<b>Which researcher(s) did you work with?</b>	<p>BelleVie has an existing relationship with Sheffield University's ESRC-funded programme, "<b>Sustainable Care: Connecting People and Systems</b>". We have collaborated with Sheffield on a project titled 'Delivering care at home: Emerging models and their implications for sustainable care and wellbeing', which was led by Dr <b>Diane Burns</b> as part of the wider Sustainable Care programme.</p> <p>In 2019, Innovation Fellow Dr <b>Karla Zimpel-Leal</b>, who is linked to both the 'Delivering care at home' project and the wider programme, conducted a case study of BelleVie for her research investigating the development of innovative homecare business models.</p> <p>We expect to continue our work with Sheffield later this year. BelleVie recently won an Innovate UK grant, which includes an agreement in principle to subcontract Sheffield University to undertake a review of existing methods for measuring outcomes for older adults receiving care, and to produce recommendations on the best approach.</p>

<p><b>How did you find your partner(s)?</b></p>	<p>My BelleVie co-founder, <a href="#">Violaine Pierre</a>, and I were fortunate enough to be on Zinc's Mission 2 programme and to gain access to their extensive network. Zinc's Chief Scientist, Rachel Carey, introduced us to Karla, who had signed up as one of Zinc's academic mentors.</p> <p>Karla then introduced us to her colleagues, Dr <a href="#">Kate Hamblin</a> and Dr <a href="#">Cate Goodlad</a>, who were looking for Care providers using different approaches as part of their research into the wellbeing of care workers.</p>
<p><b>(How) was your partnership supported?</b></p>	<p>Karla's role as an Innovation Fellow at Sheffield – where she was researching innovative solutions to the challenges of care – was funded by UKRI. The second piece of work with Sheffield was not funded but BelleVie provided interview subjects for Sheffield's funded research on the wellbeing of carers.</p>
<p><b>What did you do together?</b></p>	<p>We have completed two pieces of work with University of Sheffield and are now planning a third.</p> <p>The first was a 2019 partnership with Karla Zimpel-Leal, as part of her work on the UKRI Fellowship "Advancing business innovation and skills development in the Home Care sector". About 6 months after we launched BelleVie, Karla interviewed us and our pioneer self-managing care team to produce a case study for her research. She also wrote up a Business Model Canvas for BelleVie, which provided a useful artefact for us as we raised our first round of investment.</p> <p>The second project involved Sheffield interviewing Wellbeing Support Workers (carers) from BelleVie as part of research into carer wellbeing. This second piece of work was carried out in Summer 2020 with Dr Kate Hamblin and Dr Cate Goodlad under the Sustainable Care Programme: connecting people &amp; systems.</p> <p>BelleVie has recently been awarded a £400k Innovate UK grant under the Healthy Ageing Challenge and we'll be working with Sheffield University again under this grant. Later this year, they will carry out a review of existing methods for measuring outcomes for older adults receiving care. This research will assess the efficacy and suitability of a range of the tools and methods currently available to measure care outcomes. BelleVie will draw on the results of this research in our evolving operating model. We hope this project will take place in late 2021 / early 2022.</p>
<p><b>What did your partnership do for you?</b></p>	<p>In return for the time we contributed to support Sheffield's research, we were able access their expertise as we learned more about the challenges facing the care sector. The crisis in care is well documented in some areas, and our academic partners were able to help signpost us to relevant documents as we investigated novel approaches in our operating model.</p> <p>Our initial engagement with Karla was very helpful to our early research and design stages, when we benefited from her advice and links to research papers relevant to the care crisis. After BelleVie launched, Karla also documented our ways of working as part of her research into innovation in home care, producing a business model canvas for us to use. Having our operating model documented in this way, at a time when our resources were constrained, was really useful; it's something we've since drawn on in discussing and presenting our business.</p> <p>Our Wellbeing Support Workers, who participated in the second project with Sheffield, were grateful for the vouchers they received for volunteering their time to be interviewed for the case study. Perhaps more importantly, though, they also felt valued and part of a bigger exercise to improve care work.</p>



<p><b>What do you think your partner(s) got out of it?</b></p>	<p>Access to real users, and first-hand evidence of a different model of providing care in action. Kate Hamblin attended one of the weekly BelleVie Team Meetings for our pioneer self-managing team and reported that the discussions felt very different from those in traditional care providers, with greater decision making within the team of carers.</p>
<p><b>Was this the first time you'd worked with a university?</b></p>	<p>Yes. We had some background in research / working with researchers beyond academia, though. I have a PhD in Pharmacology, so had an understanding of academia which helped build the relationship with Sheffield. BelleVie had also previously carried out research in collaboration with the National Association of Care and Support Workers (NACAS) and the independent research body "Care Research". This led to the production of "<a href="#">The 2019 Well-being of Professional Care Workers Report</a>", based on a national survey of over 260 care workers. This report is part of a programme with the Wellcome Trust, Bethnal Green Ventures, Zinc and Big Society Capital to explore how to better bring together research and early-stage ventures tackling mental health.</p>
<p><b>Why is working with universities important to you?</b></p>	<p>It legitimises our work and adds rigour to the processes we're working through in developing our offer.</p>
<p><b>What are your top tips for other ventures and researchers thinking about working together?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeframes can be different in universities and start-ups</li> <li>• However, working together can broaden minds and add value for both parties.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are you looking for more university partners to work with in future?</b></p>	<p>BelleVie are not just a care provider; we support people to thrive at home. As part of this we are researching, designing, building and testing a managed marketplace selling third party products and services to older adults. We would be keen to work with University partners either to research the user experience or as a route to market for products/services developed by Universities for older adults.</p> <p>Anyone keen to discuss this can contact <a href="mailto:info@belleviecare.co.uk">info@belleviecare.co.uk</a></p>



## Zinc Mission 2 venture **Method X Studios** worked with Dr Sophie Turnbull at the University of Bristol on a 12-week feasibility study of their first product, Wakey!

<b>Hello! Who are you and what do you do?</b>	I'm Deborah Coughlin and I'm the Founder of <b>Method X Studios</b> . Our focus is on democratising good mental health and ending the mental health poverty gap.
<b>Which researcher(s) did you work with?</b>	We worked with Dr <b>Sophie Turnbull</b> from the University of Bristol's Medical School (Population Health Sciences)
<b>How long did you work together</b>	Between Oct 2019 and May 2020.
<b>How did you find your partner(s)?</b>	We found our partner through the Zinc.VC Research Network
<b>(How) was your partnership supported?</b>	Our work together was partly funded by the University of Bristol, which supported Dr Turnbull to work in a venture. The rest of the project funding came from a combination of Angel investment and foundation funding (investment and grants).
<b>What did you do together?</b>	<p>Dr Turnbull planned a 12-week feasibility trial of our first product, Wakey!, a breakfast TV show delivering feel-good entertainment underpinned by robust mental health science. Dr Turnbull helped us to get approval for the trial from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bristol. The trial itself helped us track and trace the effectiveness of Wakey! On six health outcomes: life satisfaction; feeling that life is worthwhile; happiness; anxiety; self-efficacy; and sleep.</p> <p>Dr Turnbull also worked with Dr Mariliis Öeren (currently our Chief Scientific Officer) to analyse the data collected through the trial, and then wrote up a report and a scientific article at the end of the project.</p>
<b>What did your partnership do for you?</b>	Our work with Dr Turnbull has fed into product design, user testing, market research and hiring.
<b>What do you think your partner(s) got out of it?</b>	Dr Turnbull gained experience in working in a start-up environment and will be publishing an academic article based on her work with us.
<b>Were there any project outputs?</b>	<p>There were two outputs of the 12-week feasibility trial:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) an internal research report describing the project and research in detail; and</li> <li>2) a scientific research paper that was submitted to the Journal of Medical Internet Research. The paper is currently in its third peer review round.</li> </ol>
<b>Was this the first time you'd worked with a university?</b>	Yes
<b>Why is working with universities important to you?</b>	Researcher and researchers are incredibly valuable to product design, especially in a company with a clear social and scientific mission.

<p><b>What are your top tips for other ventures and researchers thinking about working together?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect universities (not researchers themselves) to move more slower than you and plan for that.</li> <li>• Listen to researchers: they are the experts in research and domains.</li> <li>• Be prepared to compromise – but also to push back when needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are you looking for more university partners to work with in future?</b></p>	<p>Yes! We are interested in connecting with researchers and universities who are excited about reaching an underserved mass market demographic in the mental health and behaviour space.</p>

**Mobilise** was founded during Zinc's second mission on the future of work. They have worked with researchers at the universities of Liverpool and Bristol, and at the London School of Economics, in developing their tech start-up by carers and for carers.

<p><b>Hello! Who are you and what do you do?</b></p>	<p>James Townsend, CEO &amp; Co-Founder of Mobilise. <b>Mobilise</b> is the tech start-up by carers and for carers. We work with local authorities to improve the support they provide the UK's 13.6m unpaid carers, meeting their duties under the Care Act 2014.</p>
<p><b>Which researcher(s) did you work with?</b></p>	<p>We have been working with Dr <b>Warren Donnellan</b> at the Institute of Population Health, University of Liverpool and Dr <b>Matthew Lariviere</b> at the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. We've also done some work with <b>Philipp Friemann</b>, who is a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics and Political Science.</p>
<p><b>How long did you work together</b></p>	<p>We have worked together on a number of projects between January 2020 and June 2021.</p>
<p><b>How did you find your partner(s)?</b></p>	<p>We met Matthew Lariviere through the Zinc network and Warren Donnellan through carer chat on Twitter.</p>
<p><b>(How) was your partnership supported?</b></p>	<p>Our initial work was funded by the <b>ASPECT</b> network, which awarded funding to release Warren and Matthew from their teaching commitments, and to appoint two research assistants. Matthew and Warren have since conducted further work on a pro bono basis, to analyse data created by a project funded by Innovate UK.</p>

<p><b>What did you do together?</b></p>	<p>Our first (ASPECT-funded) project supported the collection and analysis of a series of transcripts of the daily Mobilise “cuppas” – free 45-minute video calls allowing carers to connect with around 12 other people who are also looking after a loved one. These provided valuable primary data charting the experiences of unpaid carers through lockdown. Research assistants conducted a thematic analysis which was then written up into a report by Dr Donnellan and Dr Lariviere. A range of associated dissemination activities included a launch event attended by more than 100 practitioners.</p> <p>Our second project (funded by Innovate UK) delivered a series of interviews, surveys and polls of carers, commissioners and practitioners. These were then analysed by Dr Lariviere and Dr Donnellan, who used the results to produce a policy brief expected to be published in late June 2021.</p>
<p><b>What did your partnership do for you?</b></p>	<p>Our research partnership has supported the development of Mobilise in two key ways. The first is that our approach to <b>product development</b> is heavily influenced by research undertaken by Dr Donnellan into improving carer resilience. This influence is evident, for example, on our emphasis on building carer networks.</p> <p>The second major benefit of the partnership has been in <b>establishing market credibility</b>. Partnering with researchers has accelerated the process of building credible relationships with potential clients.</p>
<p><b>What do you think your partner(s) got out of it?</b></p>	<p>Working with Mobilise created new opportunities for our partners to use existing research to deliver scalable impact, as well as allowing them to carry out new primary research using our data. By raising their profiles and supporting their publication of related academic papers, working with us has given them a boost in terms of career progression, too.</p>
<p><b>Were there any project outputs?</b></p>	<p>Our work with researcher has produced several outputs, including an academic papers, two written reports, reports, several online events and an <b>accessible project summary</b>. We’re also expecting a policy brief based on the results of the second project to be published shortly.</p>
<p><b>Was this the first time you’d worked with a university?</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p><b>Why is working with universities important to you?</b></p>	<p>Working with universities helps us make sure that we’re not reinventing the wheel and are building on existing knowledge rather than recreating it. It also adds rigour to our internal product development process, so that we can identify and work on real learnings rather than just hunches.</p>
<p><b>What are your top tips for other ventures and researchers thinking about working together?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan a long way ahead – I’d say you should start planning research opportunities at the same time as founding the company</li> <li>• Collect data for the research from day one</li> <li>• Agree with the researchers the ‘voice’ of any research in advance: is this an independent piece of academic research, or an industry-led piece of research led by the company?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Are you looking for more university partners to work with in future?</b></p>	<p>Yes, we’re looking for partners for an evaluation of our impact on carers and client local authorities, and to assist in the design of an ongoing evaluation framework. If you’re interested in those projects, let me know at <a href="mailto:james@mobiliseonline.co.uk">james@mobiliseonline.co.uk</a></p>

## About Aspect

Aspect (A Social sciences Platform for Entrepreneurship, Commercialisation and Transformation) is a network for organisations looking to make the most of commercial and business opportunities from social sciences research.

Supported by Research England's Connecting Capability Fund, Aspect members sit at the epicentre of discovery, imagination and progress in the social sciences. We draw together pioneering academics with innovative industry leaders to tackle the most complex societal challenges of our time.

Find out more at [www.aspect.ac.uk](http://www.aspect.ac.uk)

# Aspect

Transforming Society Through  
Social Science Innovation



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