

Get to know Aerospace Xelerated and Boeing's Nichola Bates

With #QVCS, Maddy Ness profiles different funds to give founders and entrepreneurs the information they need to choose the right investor. Today we interview Nichola Bates, managing partner at Aerospace Xelerated and head of global accelerators and innovation programs at Boeing.

What was your professional background before you started at Aerospace Xelerated?

I was a lawyer and earned my degree part-time while working in the court service in Northern Ireland. One of my responsibilities became outreach and communications and that was really where my interest and journey started with tech. I was working on the side with different businesses, helping them make the transition into the virtual world, and realised I'd rather do that than be a full-time lawyer.

Then I became very involved in economic development work in Northern Ireland. I was the first person to bring CoderDojo to the country and I was really

engaged in getting the tech ecosystem in Northern Ireland started and passionate about how we could help Northern Irish entrepreneurs succeed globally. I love the fact that it doesn't matter where you start, and that you can create a really successful startup from anywhere. You just have to be committed to doing it.

That evolved to me joining RepKnight as the number two there, which in turn led me to represent the security sector through a number of trade associations. I was part of the founding team of the Security and Resilience Growth partnership and was the government minister's appointee representing SMEs. That ultimately created the Joint Security and Resilience Centre (JSaRC) in the Home Office. Which is how I came to join Boeing, as their secondee to JSaRC before moving full time into supporting the growth of Boeing's UK National Security team.

Now, at Boeing, I specialise in using all my knowledge around tech ecosystems and building startups, to work alongside innovative companies using technology to advance aerospace.

Which industries are you working in?

I'm the managing partner at *Aerospace Xelerated*, a three-month programme that invests in world-class startups solving challenges for the sector, ranging from autonomous navigation to reduced workload.

What do you look for in a founder?

First and foremost, I look for someone who is passionate about what they are doing. Someone, whose energy and belief in what they're creating is really infectious. But having only passion isn't enough. I'm also looking for founders who have a realistic pathway to deliver on their vision and who are also open to learning and know how to function as a team.

Can you talk about your current portfolio?

Aerospace Xelerated is just wrapping up its *third cohort*. This time around we focused on startups across assured autonomy, autonomous navigation, generative design, smart maintenance, adaptive learning, reduced workload and Aerospace AI applications.

Among the 10 amazing companies we selected, we have a diverse and varied

portfolio ranging from AI for predictive machine maintenance, to digital twins for true autonomous flight, and real-time autonomous data collection to diversifying pilot training with psychometric assessments.

What future trends do you see coming up?

I see sustainability becoming the heart of aerospace. We have some amazing companies in our portfolio working precisely on this – HiiROC, for example, has developed a way to convert natural gas or biomethane into clean hydrogen via an electrolysis process using thermal plasma.

I also see a lot of potential for 3D printing tech and the enablement of this large-scale printing technique — Ai Build has raised \$1M to accelerate the commercialisation of its AI-powered platform for large-scale 3D printing. Authentise already got results from working with Boeing; the company's software achieved a reduction in the time it takes to process an order by 80%, and reduced build preparation time by more than 95% on average.

Another trend I see is autonomous systems becoming an emerging technology in the aerospace industry. We have Pegasus using the latest drone technology to acquire the necessary data to aid Canada's natural disaster response and sees.ai managing close visual inspection and monitoring of the electricity grid, road and rail infrastructure.

What makes Aerospace Xelerated different?

Through Aerospace Xelerated, startups are introduced to a network of angels, venture capitalists and the wider aerospace industry, throughout the 12-week programme and wider ecosystem events.

Successful companies also receive mentoring from a global network of experienced entrepreneurs, mentors and investors, plus over £100k in programme perks from partners including startup providers Google, Amazon, Stripe, Digital Ocean and many more.

Our two previous cohorts have gone on to raise £75M in additional funding and create over 100 jobs across the UK. Organisations to work with our cohorts as partners or mentors include GKN Aerospace, Ministry of Defence's Defense and Security Accelerator (DASA), Emirates, Tawazun Economic Council, Rolls-Royce, PWC, Chevron Technology Ventures and EasyJet.

What one piece of advice would you give founders?

One of the biggest challenges a founder has to face is on the financial side. Running out of money is one of the number one reasons why startups fail, so I'd advise them to secure their personal finance situation.

One big thing I'd also recommend is to ensure they have the headspace to make decisions for the business and destress other areas of life

Another top tip is to build a network. I think the most valuable thing that you can do is know where to go when you need specific help because I think the challenges you're going to face are much more varied and much greater than you can imagine when you're starting off. And if you have people you can go to who have been through it, who understand it, it's very helpful. Having a range of sounding boards to let off that steam, because otherwise, it's just too overwhelming.

Nichola Bates, managing partner at [Aerospace Xelerated](#) and head of global accelerators and innovation programs at [Boeing](#).