

Meet Zelemiq, raising capital on the Sustainable Impact Investment Programme

As part of a series with Innovate UK KTN, Maddyness spoke to Dr. Rod Lane, founder of Zelemiq. We will introduce several of the 13 'startups of the future' chosen by Innovate UK KTN to take part in its three-month sustainability accelerator programme. Working with Innovate UK KTN, Growth Studio and their ecosystems, these startups will prepare to raise external capital. The program aims to back the bright ideas that put biodiversity, the climate, and sustainability first.

What was the catalyst for starting your company?

While conducting research, I stumbled upon a discovery that seemed to relate to an influence upon the results from my glucose monitor. Back then I didn't

realise the full significance but still made a note in my logbook to come back and investigate it when I had the time. Two years later after a lot of head scratching and digging through the literature I finally understood what we had, and as is often the case with this type of serendipitous discovery it turned out to be far more groundbreaking than the subject of the original study. We quickly came to realise that we had something of global importance, something that could make a real difference to billions of people.

Tell me about your business – what it does, what it aims to achieve, who you are aiming to reach etc?

We have developed sugrtracr, a sensor that can be fitted into the next generation of smartwatches and fitness trackers. It will give these devices the ability to monitor blood sugar levels in response to food intake, indicate to the wearer when their body is burning fat and track lactate levels for fatigue and recovery tracking during exercise. Smart watch manufacturers can use this for their customers to create new versions of their apps in order to measure these new things alongside measuring sleep and exercise as they already can.

We have developed the technology and are in the full swing of testing with real users, including athletes at Solent University and University of Southampton. We're ready to now work with fitness wearable manufacturers to demonstrate how sugrtracr can be fitted in their devices.

Explain your engagement with the InnovateUK KTN SIIP accelerator and why you applied for it

My initial thoughts were 'not another accelerator programme'. We had been on two of these already, they had taken up a lot of time and effort and had not yielded much in the way of results.

Fortunately my co founders in the business pointed out to me that Innovate UK must recognise what we are doing is having huge value for society to have invited us to compete for a place on SIIP. We got through the first round and on to an interview with the programme mentor for them to decide if we had a place or not. This was the turning point for me, I was so impressed by the mentor, his knowledge and experience that I knew this programme would be at the next level for us.

I remember coming out of that first meeting with Growth Studio and saying to the rest of the team we want this! Opportunities like this do not come around very often and the programme has indeed been at another level to any support we have had in the past – really excited to see where we go with it.

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[Innovate UK KTN's Sustainable Impact Investment Programme chooses 13 UK startups](#)

Describe the working culture at your company

We have consciously created an ego-free, non hierarchical working environment. We are not the sort of company that has allocated parking spaces for the directors. We actively promote inquisitiveness, as the saying goes the most amazing ideas can come from the most unexpected places. We all understand that we've made mistakes and it's those mistakes that have meant we've created what we have. Most importantly everyone is treated as an equal, and everyone gets a say.

What has been your biggest challenge so far with your company, and how did you overcome it?

In the early stages we were bootstrapping the development from consultancy work we were doing, this revenue dried up with the outbreak of COVID and we nearly had to fold. I was able to 'loan' some members of my team to another company making decontamination units for the NHS, helping to make ends meet.

But given the potential of sugrtracr that we had proved – we weren't ready to give up.

We sourced other avenues of funding and planned how to accelerate our development to make up for lost time. Thankfully we got the Innovate UK

Sustainability grant, meaning we could get back to working full-time on the project. We finished the feasibility work, produced prototypes and protected the IP – result.

Thanks to the grant, we've reached a point where we are opening our seed investment round.

How does your company answer an unmet need?

We all need three things for a healthy lifestyle, proper exercise, good sleep, and food of the right type eaten at the right times of day. Smartwatches and fitness are playing an increasing role in helping us to achieve this healthy lifestyle. They can already track our exercise and sleep without us having to do anything, however the only way they can know anything about our food intake is through what we tell them through an app. With sugrtracr, smartwatches and fitness trackers can now do exactly this.

Smartwatch manufacturers survive through innovation, historically Apple's increasing market share can be directly attributed to the introduction of new features for their watches. But so far, the only way to measure blood sugar involves some form of needle.

But with the sugrtracr sensor, new smartwatches will measure the body's response to food intake and relating this to exercise and sleep without you having to do anything, leading to better informed life choices about food for a healthier fitter life.

What is in store for the future?

We have completed designing the sensor design and are in the last phase of user testing – the results have been incredible (accuracy within 10% of the nearest 'gold standard' test).

Now we're ready to show manufacturers what sugrtracr can do through joint R&D projects with the aim of licensing the design – using the ARM model.

Based on our roadmap – there's no reason why we couldn't see sugrtracr in smartwatches launching in as early as 2025.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

You're about to make a huge change in your life and the lives of your family – really think about why you want to do this. Is it the money? If so there are easier ways of having the best car on your street. However if creating a positive change in the world is what excites you then you have the right motivation to succeed, there are no guarantees of success but I do know that you will feel alive in ways you otherwise wouldn't in a 9-5 job. If you have what it takes – it's an incredible ride.

Dr. Rod Lane is the founder of [Zelemiq](#).

The [Sustainable Impact Investment Programme](#) (SIIP) is a three-month accelerator, specially designed for selected startups who have previously received funding from Innovate UK's Sustainable Innovation Fund (SIF). The objective of the SIIP accelerator is to prepare both the business and founders of the winning startups with the knowledge, tools and investor connections to raise their next round of investment up to £5M through a confident proposition, materials, and communications.

SIIP is an initiative led and funded by [Innovate UK KTN](#) to support high growth impact-driven startups from the UK who were awarded grants from the Sustainable Innovation Fund to aid economic recovery after Covid. This programme is a collaborative effort by Innovate UK KTN and [Growth Studio](#).

Article by DR. ROD LANE