Helping UCL innovators scale globally, a profile of UCL Technology Fund

With #QVCS, Maddyness profiles different funds to give founders and entrepreneurs the information they need to choose the right investor. Today, we speak to David Grimm, Partner at AlbionVC and UCL Technology Fund.

Temps de lecture : minute

22 April 2024

Back in 2009 I jumped out of a stable and well paid job in a London-based consultancy to go and earn very little building a startup dairy business in Shanxi, China. That moment of diving in and taking a risk took me on a journey into the world of fund raising and building businesses from the ground up. Fast forward 15 years and I'm now helping founders starting out on their entrepreneurial journeys, with support and capital at AlbionVC. Many of them are first-time founders that we back out of university from the UCL Technology Fund. It's great to be using my academic background (quantum mechanics and creation of Bose-Einstein condensates) and natural interest in technology alongside my own startup background to help people. The wider mission of the fund, to solve the world's most pressing problems by backing fundamental innovation born out of research at UCL, is very motivating too!

Which industries are you working in?

My focus is on early-stage deeptech across the physical sciences and engineering faculty at UCL. The areas I think are most interesting are future of compute, novel AI and the energy transition. Amongst the 30+

university spin-outs that we've backed across AlbionVC's funds we have some great examples of businesses pushing back these frontiers. We have startups in Quantum, Next-Gen Memory, Photonics, Batterytech, GenAI and other ML techniques that are great examples of UCL excelling in these areas..

What do you look for in a founder?

Deeptech founders need to be able to create technological solutions and have a deep enough understanding of the science to be able to create products, but they also need to love the problem more than their technology. I'm looking for founders who understand that and are already falling in love with the problem (not just obsessed with the perfection of their solution). They need the skills to sell their big vision and grit to see a long journey through. It's also worth noting that the average deeptech entrepreneur/investor relationship is longer than the average marriage so we need to understand each other and be committed to working collaboratively for the next decade.

Can you talk about your current portfolio?

The _UCL Technology Fund_ has a big portfolio, that's because we will make small early PoC investments as a quick way to get technologies off the lab bench and achieving early proof points. Many of these then graduate into larger Seed and Series A investments. We've seen 4 NASDAQ IPOs, and exits to Olympus and Meta.

Companies currently in the portfolio include: Phasecraft (Series A,working towards quantum advantage), Intrinsic (Series A, semiconductor memory, Bramble Energy (Series B, fuel cell technology for clean transportation), Humanloop (ex YC, one of Europe's most exciting gen AI companies), Echopoint (Series A, Optical Sensing) and many more - we've just announced Oriole Networks (Photonics for Data Centres) and StanhopeAI

(Agentic AI).

The vast majority of these investments are aligned with our impact goals of developing technology that promotes a healthy planet, healthy people and healthy working.

What does the future look like?

One big change in the UK landscape is the Mansion House compact which paves the way for pension funds to invest more actively into venture capital. One of the big drivers behind the success of the VC industry in the US and the creation of so much value was the reinterpretation of the 'Prudent Man Rule' which allowed pension funds to deploy into the VC asset class. We're hoping to see a similar long term effect in the UK.

It's a great time for more capital to flow into the market, particularly in deeptech. For a while software ate VC, and investing in deeper technologies was a lonely sport, but in the last few years the twin forces of the limitation of hardware to support growing computational demands and the climate crisis needing physical solutions have brought hardware investing back into fashion as the world needs these solutions to support sustainable progress. It's great when these two opportunities merge, like with Oriole Networks, where photonics advancements make data centres faster and more efficient.

What makes UCL Technology Fund different?

Together with our partners in the fund UCL Business, we work at the earliest stages of venture. Often when we speak to founders they're only just formulating where they *might* take their innovations. We will roll up our sleeves and help them think about the possibilities and create connections to help them test their ideas.

Many of the opportunities that we ultimately fund look very different from the first plans presented and we're proud of the work we do to help create exciting ventures. The spin-out companies that we've worked with have gone on to raise over $2B in external funding so we know that we're helping to create valuable propositions. Because of the nature of university research many of these opportunities are solving really important global problems, as an example, three quarters of the fund's current portfolio is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals working towards a more sustainable future.

What one piece of advice would you give founders?

Look after yourselves. A deeptech journey from inception to commercial success is often a long journey with lots of ups and downs. Partner with those who see you as a human and will support you in the difficult moments, not just when there are positive headlines to shout about. Take time to celebrate the successes and seek support when things feel hard. All the biggest successes had moments when it felt like they were falling apart.

David Grimm is a Partner at _AlbionVC_ and _UCL Technology Fund_.

Investing in tech while fostering company culture with AlbionVC

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