

Entrepreneur to launch new Connection Heroes platform after national award win

A North East business owner has scooped a national award to help grow a new platform designed to boost human connections in the workplace.

Di Gates, founder and owner of virtual consultancy Stick Theory, is one of scores of high-potential entrepreneurs from around the UK who have been awarded £50,000 each by Innovate UK, to help launch a series of new ventures. The award will support the launch of Connection Heroes, a new development programme which recognises how the working world has changed radically in recent years, leaving many people disconnected from their work, workplace, managers and colleagues.

The platform is aimed at organisations that want to improve human connections across hybrid workplaces, to help them drive employee engagement, retention and wellbeing. The funding forms part of an overall £6.2m cash pot from the Government's innovation agency and is designed to find and support the fresh innovation talent the UK needs.

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A total of 233 high-potential entrepreneurs from across the UK have received funding, from more than 2,100 applications. As well as the £50,000 grant, Ms Gates will get 12 months of tailored business support.

The new platform Connection Heroes was triggered by research explored by Ms Gates, which showed that 90% of UK employees are currently disengaged from their job and 71% are looking

for a new job this year. She wanted to design a platform to address the growing problem of employees disconnecting from work, while recognising how improving connections across hybrid teams can be complex and difficult.

The pilot programme, which launches in June, lasts from six to 12 weeks and guides participants through a tailored series of workshops, scenario games and micro learning, all powered by experienced experts and the smart digital platform.

Playing as a group, they'll tackle a set of challenging online scenario games, each representing a real-world situation that could arise if workplace connection breaks down and engagement starts to drop. Those taking part can track their own development through the platform, and a company dashboard shows the cohort's journey and the forecast impact on engagement, retention and wellbeing.

Ms Gates said: "I've worked with dozens of organisations since the pandemic, helping them build better connections across their remote and hybrid teams. This funding has allowed me to formalise my framework and build an intuitive digital platform that powers a unique and fun learning and development experience. I've had loads of interest already and I can't wait to start the pilot programme in June."