

PLEXAL LAUNCHES 6-WEEK RAPID INNOVATION ACCELERATOR TO HELP 15 EARLY-STAGE STARTUPS IN OMAN ADDRESS COVID-19 CHALLENGES

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- The UK-Oman Digital Hub has appointed Plexal and AL JABR to develop a virtual programme to support the startup ecosystem in Oman with the Rapid Innovation Accelerator
- The accelerator will tackle challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, and launches online today
- Plexal and AL JABR will offer Omani startups expert advice from academic partner Imperial College London's Centre for Financial Technology, business leaders across the UK and UK entrepreneurs
- The programme will provide opportunities for international collaboration from across the UK and Oman's startup ecosystems

Plexal, the innovation centre and coworking space established by Delancey, has launched the Rapid Innovation Accelerator today in partnership with Omani innovation development company AL JABR. This virtual-first, six-week programme will connect digital innovators in the UK with counterparts in Oman to help them develop technology-led solutions to the local challenges posed by Covid-19.

Plexal's innovation team has analysed the response to the pandemic from UK startups, as well as the impact of Covid-19 on Omani society and businesses, to design the Rapid Innovation Accelerator. It has selected mentors from across the UK to support Omani entrepreneurs through a bespoke education programme that includes workshops and mentoring.

The Centre for Financial Technology at Imperial College London, (RIYADA) (an SME development authority in Oman) and Oman's Ministry of Transport, Communication & Information Technology are strategic programme partners that will help Plexal and AL JABR deliver the course content.



For further information,
please contact:

Sophie Shennan
Seven Hills
Sophie.shennan@wearesevenhills.com

Sophie Ingham Clark
Communications Manager
Delancey
Tel: +44 (0)20 7448 1961
sophie.ingham-clark@delancey.com

The aim of the Rapid Innovation Accelerator is to support entrepreneurs to develop their early-stage digital solutions that enable more businesses to transition and thrive, enable all students in Oman to learn virtually and support virtual communities. The programme recognises that the UK innovation community has stepped up during the pandemic in these three areas in particular, using technology to enable communities, education providers and businesses to pivot, continue to operate or find new markets and audiences.

Mentors have been chosen from across the UK's startup, academic and business ecosystem and include David Ripert, co-founder and CEO of Poplar Studio, Helene Panzarino, Rapid Innovation Programme Director at the Centre for Financial Technology, Imperial College London, and many more. Omani startups taking part include online livestock marketplace Tharwa Oman, online virtual community platform Muscateer and Oclick, an online freelance marketplace.

The programme will include a virtual demo day on 14 March. More information can be found at plexal.com/rapid-innovation-accelerator

Connecting innovation hubs in the UK and Oman

The Rapid Innovation Accelerator has the support of the British Embassy in Muscat and is spearheaded by the UK-Oman Digital Hub. The hub aims to establish the UK as digital partner for Oman and build a digital ecosystem across Oman. It appointed Plexal to deliver this cross-border programme in recognition of the opportunity for innovation hubs to share knowledge and expertise. As well as supporting Omani innovators, the UK mentors will gain connections in Oman – a country that is committed to growing its technology ecosystem and collaborating with international hubs under the leadership of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq al-Said.

Plexal, established by Delancey, is an innovation centre and coworking space that specialises in forging connections between industry, academia, investors, startups and scaleups to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing society. It also delivers the UK government-backed cybersecurity programme, LORCA (the London Office for Rapid Cybersecurity Advancement) which has supported 72 cybersecurity scaleups gain over £160m in VC funding since the programme launched just over two years ago.

Based in Muscat, AL JABR is an Omani innovation development company focused on enriching the efforts within the Omani entrepreneurial ecosystem, mainly through startup development programs and industry innovation initiatives.



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Economies and communities across the world are facing similar challenges created by the pandemic, and it's more important than ever that innovation hubs collaborate and share knowledge. Oman has a thriving startup community, and we're excited to unite the brightest minds from the UK's academic and business ecosystem to support Omani startups with developing their solutions.



Andrew Roughan
Managing Director
Plexal



Mentors and startups

The full list of Omani startups taking part in the Rapid Innovation Accelerator is:

1. Tharwa Oman – an online livestock marketplace
2. Bahar Platform – an online fish purchasing platform
3. Taafi Platform – an online medical shop
4. EWathiq – an edtech platform
5. Ocliclick – an online freelance marketplace
6. Taskit – a task-based marketplace
7. Mskkn – a digital real estate platform
8. Muscateer – an online virtual community platform
9. Labaqah – an online gift shop
10. Apimoth – A bee management company
11. Maareb Technology – a provider of blockchain based digital solutions
12. Ala Darbik – an online freight management platform
13. Data Academy – an online data science learning platform to support the fourth Industrial Revolution
14. Impact Integrated – an AI based talent development platform
15. ETTEQA – a cybersecurity training and services platform

UK mentors include:

- Experts from Plexal's innovation team, including Managing Director Andrew Roughan, Head of Innovation Strategy Russell Gundry, Head of Business Strategy Bruno Sussat and Commercial Director Dave Rowley
- Nelson Phillips, Professor of Innovation and Strategy, co-director of the Centre for Responsible Leadership, and the Associate Dean of External Relations at Imperial College Business School in London
- Professor Deepthi Chana, Co-director of the Institute for Security Science and Technology and the Centre for Financial Technology at Imperial College London
- Helene Panzarino, Rapid Innovation Programme Director, CFT, Imperial College London

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- Ian Hobday, Founder and CEO of Start-up-Gurus, Expert in Residence at Imperial College London
- Dr Marc Sloan, an entrepreneur experienced in building and commercialising deep tech products during the Covid-19 pandemic and founder of Covid Tech
- Yann Mathias, Director of Innovation at Mtart, entrepreneur, innovator and design expert
- Ashley Staines, Founder Volunteero
- David Ripert, Co-founder CEO, Poplar Studio
- Kushal Puri, Head of Growth, Licel
- Tommy Ekman, Innovation Lead, Freshfields
- Olga Kravchenko, CEO, Musemio
- Dr Param Shah, UK Director, Federation of India Chamber of Commerce and Founder of start-up Xchange
- Parag Arora, Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer, Glowing.io
- Mete Coban MBE, founder and Chief Executive of My Life My Say
- Berta Pappenheim, co-founder and CEO, The CyberFish

Andrew Roughan, managing director of Plexal, commented: *"Economies and communities across the world are facing similar challenges created by the pandemic, and it's more important than ever that innovation hubs collaborate and share knowledge. Oman has a thriving startup community, and we're excited to unite the brightest minds from the UK's academic and business ecosystem to support Omani startups with developing their solutions. Our virtual-first accelerator demonstrates the sort of borderless collaboration we need more of, and Plexal's intention is to continue working in this way with many more hubs around the world."*



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Omanis are continually finding digital solutions to everyday problems, and the global crisis has accelerated this trend. We are really excited by the Rapid Innovation Accelerator project and to be working with Plexal, Imperial Collage London and local partner AL JABR. Together, we aim to help the budding start up ecosystem overcome challenges and develop resilient solutions.

Henry Howard
Head
UK-Oman Digital Hub



Henry Howard, Head of the UK-Oman Digital Hub, a British Embassy initiative commented: *"Over the last year Covid-19 has impacted lives and businesses all over the world. On top of this Oman has faced additional economic challenges due to fluctuations in the price of oil. But with these challenges comes opportunities. Omanis are continually finding digital solutions to everyday problems, and the global crisis has accelerated this trend. We are really excited by the Rapid Innovation Accelerator project and to be working with Plexal, Imperial Collage London and local partner AL JABR. Together, we aim to help the budding start up ecosystem overcome challenges and develop resilient solutions."*

Mohammed Al Wahaibi, CEO of AL JABR, commented: *"The past year has shown us more than ever how important startups are in pushing things forward. How can a single idea – if supported – solve a major problem? During the pandemic, we have witnessed how much we have in common across the world. We shared similar challenges. And now, we must learn how to solve them together. We are proud of the partnership with the UK-Oman Digital Hub, Plexal and Imperial College London to bring together mentors and supporters to elevate Omani startups through developing the Rapid Innovation Accelerator program. We have a growing startup ecosystem, and the Rapid Innovation Accelerator program is here to reinforce and boost this growth that we at AL JABR are committed to."*

Professor Deeph Chana, Imperial College London, commented: *"As encapsulated in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals the world faces numerous challenges ranging from climate change, the eradication of poverty, access to education and establishing secure and resilient societies. Technologists and innovators will play a crucial role in solving these problems with start-ups providing the driving force for the imaginative solutions of tomorrow. Bringing together a partnership in innovation excellence from Oman and the UK provides the opportunity to demonstrate the value of international collaboration and how the best conditions for accelerating progress can be established and sustained"*



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Mohammed Al Wahaibi
CEO
AL JABR



Notes to Editors

About Plexal

Plexal is an innovation centre and coworking space that specialises in building collaborative communities.

Its innovation team delivers bespoke programmes for clients like Innovate UK and Transport for London, and forges connections between industry, academia, investors, startups and scaleups to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing society.

Plexal has been appointed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport to deliver the London Office for Rapid Cybersecurity Advancement (LORCA): an innovation programme aimed at scaling cybersecurity solutions that are needed most by industry.

It's also delivered OpenDoor, an inclusive innovation accelerator, and has partnered together with Global Disability Innovation Hub, UCL, Disability Rights UK and more to support disabled entrepreneurs and make its workspace more accessible.

Startup and scaleup members of Plexal's workspace benefit from a comprehensive programme of events and tailored support, including 1:1 consultations. Members work in areas like mobility, AI, healthtech, cybersecurity, fintech, the Internet of Things, VR and more.

Plexal was launched in 2017 and was founded by clients of specialist real estate investment advisory company Delancey.

For more information visit: plexal.com



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About AL JABR

Al JABR, is an Omani company that focuses on startup development and corporate innovation with the aim to build a regional hub for startup development, bridge startup innovation with corporate ambition and create new access channels to capital it being Financial, Human & Intellectual.

Al JABR was formally established in 2019, by Mohammed Al Wahibi and Fatma Bahwan who founded multiple startups and initiatives all focused on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in Oman such as co-working spaces, startup ideation programs and Oman's first expert based online learning platform Edlal.com.

Al JABR efforts in the entrepreneurship ecosystem include hosting and facilitating the focused group labs for the national strategy of SME development for the SME development (Riyada), Content development of EBDA program which is a startups development program in partnership with BP Oman within the coworking space in Muscat for 3 cohorts.



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