

A collage of various images from Startup Dunedin events, including group photos, award ceremonies, and people working together. The text "Startup Dunedin" is in white and "2025 impact report" is in green, both centered over the collage. Decorative diagonal stripes in green and orange are in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

Startup Dunedin

2025 impact report

Year In Review

The Ōtepoti startup ecosystem is thriving. The incredibly busy year started with our first regional pilot of microgrants. We saw student numbers grow, hosted monthly founders-only spaces, and supported over 200 start-up sessions.

We've loved joining forces with Startup Aotearoa to support more high-growth founders and partnering with Momentum for more tertiary student pathways. We even got an Otago "**Kiwinet Student Entrepreneur of the Year**"!

With great guest speakers, mentors, judges and events, the ecosystem continues to turn up and support those coming through.



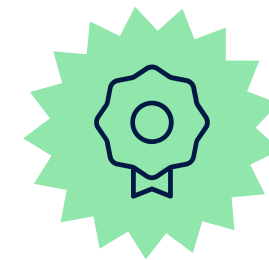
217

One on one startup sessions



95

Student startups engaged



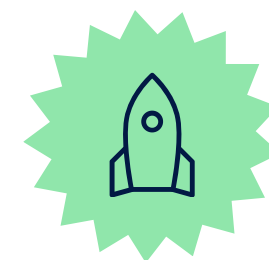
22

Microgrant recipients



174

Events and workshops



45

High growth startups supported

Audacious

Audacious ran a **71-strong cohort** this year of students from a huge range of disciplines. Some students joined because they were working on a startup or side hustle, others were building their entrepreneurial skills, or seeing where their research could take them.

Audacious saw a series of **formal workshops** - eight of which covered the core content and additional workshops based on what the students were keen to learn more about. In addition to the workshops, each student is also connected to industry experts, mentors, and each other.

Student Pitch Competition

For the first time, anyone studying at the University of Otago or Otago Polytechnic could enter our Student Pitch Competition. \$5,000 in cash prizes were available for student ideas, and tertiary students from 21 different areas of study and disciplines were represented in our pitch submissions.

Our most competitive year to date with 35 submissions including a potato-based icecream, clothing that grows with your child, disc golf marketplace and unique running events, sustainable hijabs and student storage solutions for summer!



Student pitch competition



35

Student startup pitches

Any student enrolled at the **University of Otago** or **Otago Polytechnic** is eligible to enter the student pitch competition. Students present their idea for five minutes to an external panel of judges.

This year it was incredibly competitive across 21 areas of study, with \$5,000 was awarded across student startups and 11 founders invited to receive additional coaching through Startup Dunedin.



Areas of study

- Finance/Economics
- Entrepreneurship
- Computer Science
- Law
- Marketing
- Sports/Exercise Science
- Commerce
- Culinary Arts
- Marine Science
- Mathematics
- PPE
- IT
- Management
- Communications - Games
- Fashion Design
- Accounting
- Sociology
- Medicine
- Nutrition

20 Years of Student Startups

This year, we celebrated two decades of tertiary support for student-led start-ups. We brought together alumni over the years, dug out old photos and logos, and celebrated the unique collaboration and model that makes up the legacy of all things student startups.

We brought together everyone (and many party hats) to reflect this milestone. Joined by **Maree Thyne, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Otago Business school**, alongside some of our best student stories.

Jason Leong, co-founder of **PocketSmith**, who's been a mentor and supporter of the startup community since his student days in 2008. Anna Guenther, founder of **PledgeMe** and fierce advocate for equitable funding, who launched her company as part of her Master of Entrepreneurship. Brendan Yelder and Oli Despatis, founders of **Cheeky Iced Tea**, who started during lockdown while studying marketing, and now have stock across the country.

All journey's were is equal parts hustle and heart - and **a perfect reflection of what's possible here in Dunedin.**



20 Years of Student Startups Highlights



“The generosity of spirit of the advisers that came through the University and supported the students and hyped up their ideas – you can’t even put words to **how important that is for the start of an idea.**”

- Anna, **PledgeMe**



“The Council, Polytech and University really came together to give us a shot and partake of this environment. It set off a chain reaction with other small businesses and startups across the city and made the flourishing ecosystem that we have today. **Long may it last.**”

- Jason, **PocketSmith**



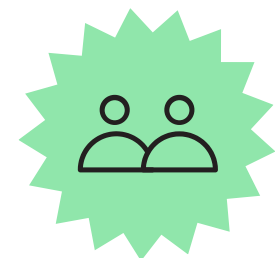
“The power of being a Dunedin student is that you can pretty much talk to anyone. I genuinely think that if we’d tried to start this company **in any other city it probably wouldn’t have worked as well.**”

- Brendan, **Cheeky Iced Tea**

National Partnerships



This year, Startup Dunedin partnered with Startup Aotearoa to deliver the program that allows any founder in New Zealand to access startup support via one-on-one coaching sessions. This year, **115 coaching sessions were funded through this partnership.**

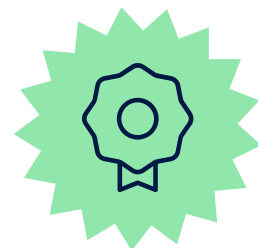


115

Meetings funded through Startup Aotearoa

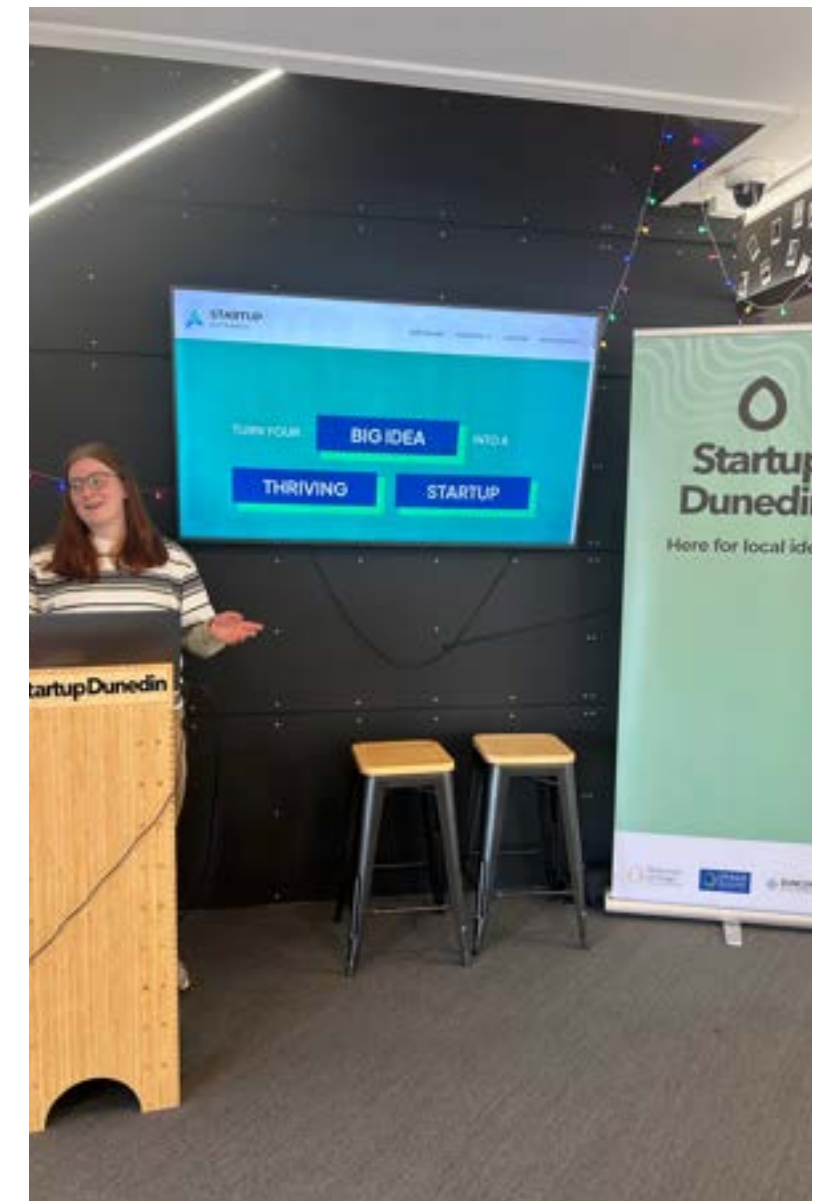


Momentum is a national, student-led investment committee that connects early-stage founders with expert advice, networks, and real-world opportunities. This year, **Startup Dunedin officially became the local delivery partner for Otago!**



9

Student projects presented to Mometum



Bachelor of Entrepreneurship - Teaching

This year, the Startup Dunedin team began teaching ENTR112, a 100-level papers, focused on **practical startup methodology** and developing student entrepreneurial capability.

Whether students are passionate about solving problems, launching ventures, or driving change within organisations, the Bachelor of Entrepreneurship degree gives them the tools, networks, and confidence to make things happen.

This degree is designed for students who want to turn ideas into impact. It is a flexible, self-directed degree that can be combined with almost any other area of study, from Law to Māori studies, science, or commerce.

Delivering an entire paper has been such a great learning experience and a **great extension of the relationship** between industry and academia across the Leith River.



Microgrants - A regional Pilot

- 49 applications received
- \$112,475 requested
- 36 one-on-one meetings delivered

We know a small amount of funding can really shift the needle for early stage startups. It might be for a prototype, attend an event or build something to test with customers. We worked closely with community organisations to make this an accessible process, open to any ideas - creative, tech, impact-led and everything in between.

Some of the highlights included:

- Emerging local trends with high numbers of **EdTech, MedTech, HealthTech**
- 36 founders to accessed **bespoke tailored tools**, advice, and alternative funding pathways (e.g., Waste Minimisation Fund, Hapori Fund, King's Trust) as part of the process
- We got to share our learnings and support the replication of the model in **Queenstown Lakes and Clutha regions!**

4

Tech for good

4

Showcasing
nationally or
internationally

1

Patentable
medical device

1

Youth-led
project

12

Startups
funded

2

Pasifika
and Māori
founded

1

Former refugee
starting up

1

Hardware
project

1

Academic
project

Spotlight on MedTech

Dunedin's innovation and tech sector had a big year. For TechWeek 2025 we brought together some of the stories to celebrate. **Julie Curphey, from NZTE**, facilitated the conversation with three standout leaders building global solutions from right here in our city.

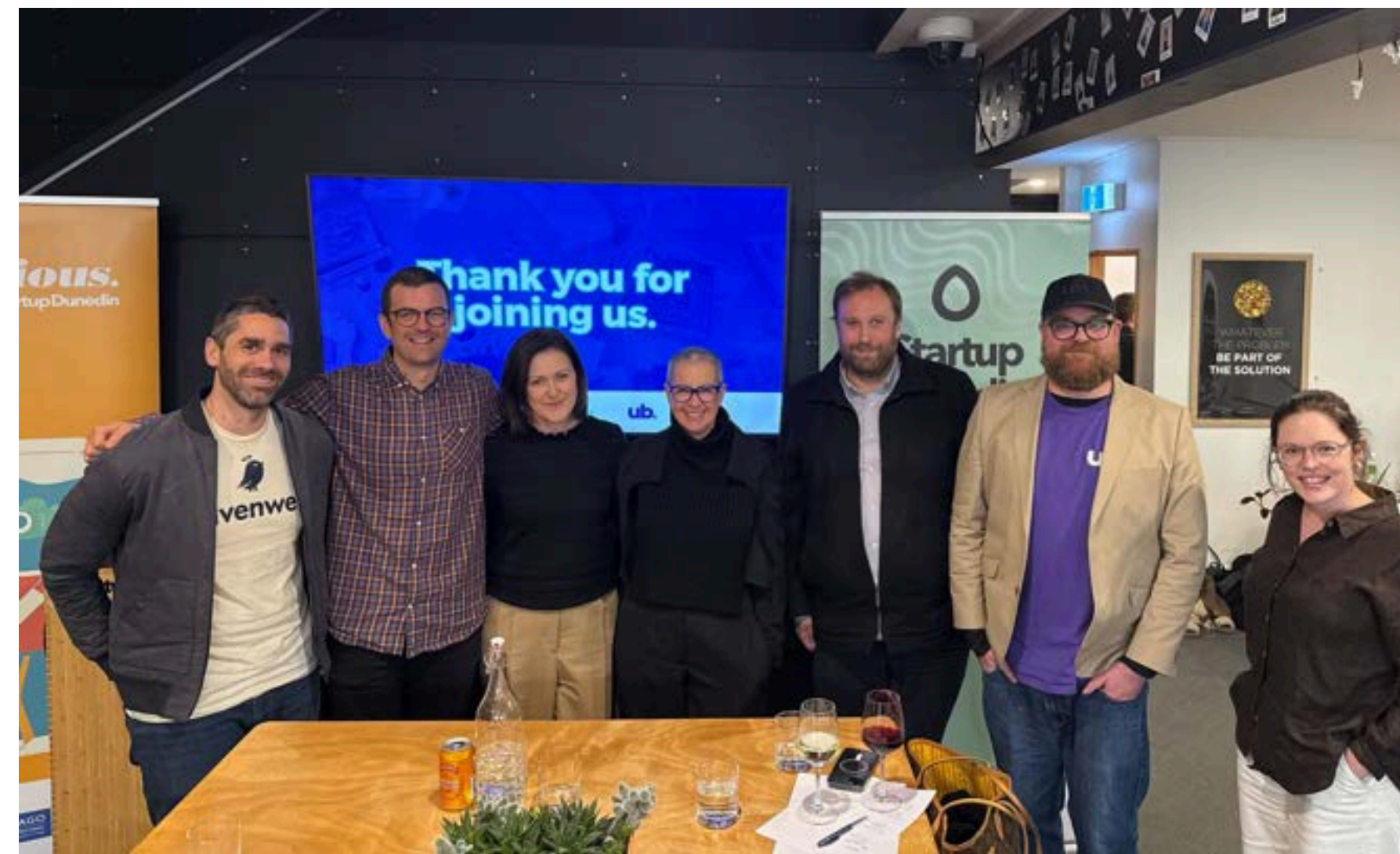
Elli Cares, an award-winning mobile app that supports independent living for seniors; **Soter**, an AI-powered doorstep management system designed to support people in vulnerable situations; and **ADInstruments** an established global leader in scientific hardware and software for life science research and education. 2025 was about **sharing stories on scaling impact from Dunedin to the world**.

Mistakes Were Made

This event series flips the traditional founders' event on its head, spotlighting the real stories behind the missteps, surprises, and hard-won lessons that shape innovation.

We got candid insights from Tim Wixon (**BNZ**), Leanne Ross (**Netsafe**), and Jonny Mirkin (**Givenwell**), each sharing what they learned when things didn't go to plan.

This authentic and energising session brought together Ōtepoti's startup community, **and we can't wait for 2026 to make this a calendar staple**.





Startup Dunedin hosted a week of entrepreneurial workshops with the **Kings Trust**



Young Enterprise Scheme regional awards is always a stand out in the calendar



Rachel, Startup Dunedin GM with Claire Porima, Chair KUMA the **20th KUMA Māori Business awards** as a judge this year



Startup Dunedin hosted **174** workshops and events in 2025!



This year, Grace joined the **OUSA Grants Committee**, and we also got to deliver alongside Amy from DCC a session on grants and sustainability for OUSA clubs.



Thank you.

We could not do this without our judges, mentors, guest speakers, alumni and founders. An extra big thank you the funders & partners who make it happen: **Dunedin City Council, University of Otago,** and **Otago Polytechnic.**

