The revival of manufacturing in Hayes

Hillingdon People takes an inside look at how the new Central Research Laboratory (CRL) is keeping the rich industrial history of Hayes alive and creating new employment opportunities in the borough.

The former EMI factory once home to the world's largest producer and exporter of vinyl records by iconic bands, including the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, is currently being redeveloped by specialists in urban regeneration U+I, as The Old Vinyl Factory, bringing 4,000 jobs to Hayes, with support from the council.

In its heyday, the site employed more than 20,000 people, not only producing records but also developing new technologies. The original EMI CRL's scientists and inventors developed the very first CAT scanner, and the 'Emitron', the forerunner of television and stereo sound.

A partnership between U+I, Brunel University and the Higher Education Funding Council for England has now brought the CRL back to its former home, recreating its technology development concept in a modern day format.

The CRL is the UK's first hardware incubator programme for innovative startups. Incubator programmes, popular in the US, sign up businesses, who offer shares in their companies, in order to receive expert support, facilities and a place to work to get their startup off the ground and investor ready.

Programme Director, James Nettleton, said: "Our goal is to recreate the EMI CRL's model of creative, collaborative and commercial innovation, where the most exciting products and pioneering businesses are born. We've already been amazed by the support we've had from the design, tech and investment communities. In the next year, we'd like to be three times our current size, bringing more jobs to the area and encouraging businesses to stay on-site with us to continue collaborating."

The programme, which is nearing the end of its pilot year, will take applications each academic year from hardware businesses in order to find and develop a new generation of products. The CRL will support their growth via one-to-one mentoring, access to finance, expert guidance in design for manufacture, rapid prototyping with a bespoke workspace and workshop with state-of-the-art 3D printers, laser cutters and tools, brand development and through its collaborative community of graduates, businesses, scientists, designers, investors and engineers.

Cllr Jonathan Bianco, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services, said: "The council gave planning permission for the Old Vinyl Factory site in April 2013, which will provide homes, commercial offices and entertainment venues, as well as the CRL, revitalising the area. Developments like these illustrate the council's commitment to regeneration and investment, supporting new and existing businesses and creating new jobs. We are also glad to see that Brunel is encouraging young talent to stay in Hillingdon."

The current intake

Eleven businesses are taking part in the pilot programme. Most have technological backgrounds, with some staying local, having graduated from Brunel University. Each company is markedly different, offering a variety of unique products.

Kohen Judd, 26, from New Zealand. Company: Deep Six

Whilst studying for a masters in product design from the Royal College of Arts, Kohen conceived the idea of producing a drone which explores underwater life. The product can be used by someone from a beach, riverside - a boat isn't necessary, and it electronically transmits its findings. The programme has allowed him to refine his product and develop the business model. He said: "It's one of those things that you never know if you will enjoy and I took the plunge. I even found out that I'm following in the footsteps of my granddad, who was an audio engineer in the former EMI factory."

Cara O'Sullivan, 22, former Brunel student, living in Hayes. Company: Ossatura

Cara has produced an evolvable walking aid, a range of parts which can be easily assembled to form a walking stick, crutches, and walking frame, saving the user from buying a new walking aid when their mobility condition changes. Her concept was conceived in an internship during her degree in industrial design and technology at Brunel, where she saw disabled children in a rehabilitation centre in Peru using equipment which used the same components. For her degree, she invented an affordable adaptable wooden walking aid for those living in poverty. The evolvable walking aid is an offspring of that to help walking aid users in the UK. It has already proved successful, with Cara winning an award and receiving additional funding. Her team is made up of two students from Brunel, who she hopes will continue the journey.

James Atkis, 23, former Brunel student. Company: Denovi

James studied product design at Brunel, graduating last year. He heard about the course through the partnership between Brunel and the CRL. His product is a digital drawing system, which does not need a table top tablet and sends the design to a computer. He said: "The programme has been a really good opportunity to develop what I had and they have really helped the business to grow and provide a structure for it to be successful. I'm now looking to expand my team."

Are you an entrepreneur looking to grow an innovative hardware startup?

For more information and to apply to be part of next year's programme visit www.centralresearchlaboratory.com