

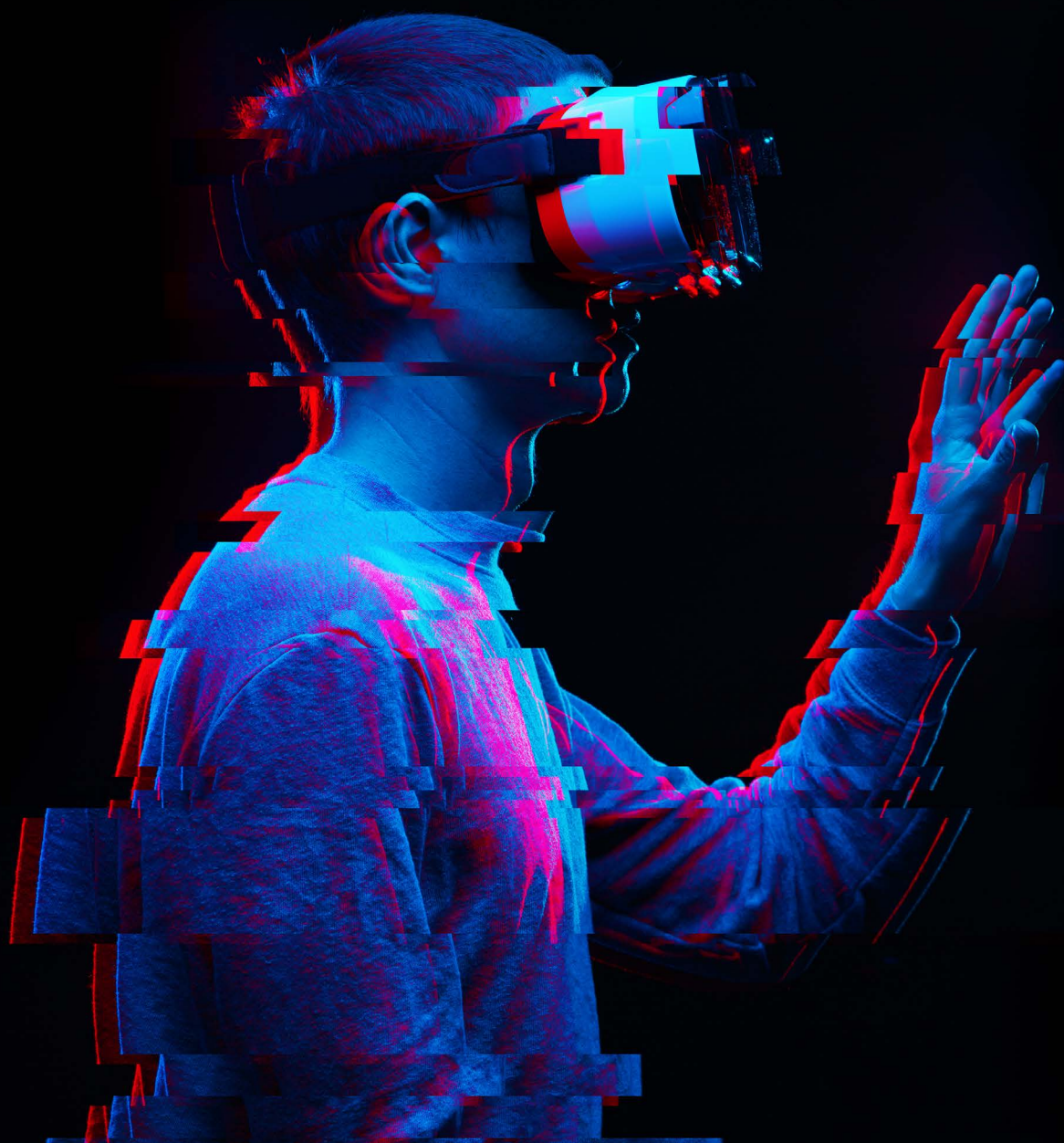


Innovate
UK



Innovation Loan Success Stories

Head Set



Introduction to Head Set

We live in a world of evolving threats, from a global pandemic to civil unrest and a relentless stream of online hostilities. Head Set's vision is to build a safer and more resilient generation of journalists, humanitarians and first-responders using cutting edge virtual reality training and emotion-sensing technology.

Founded by former journalists Kate Parkinson and Aela Callan, Head Set offers innovative immersive masterclasses based on their own experiences of feeling under prepared in dangerous situations. This is revolutionising the way people with high-risk jobs train.

Having spent a decade as a foreign correspondent covering some of the world's worst conflicts, Kate has first-hand experience of how existing training doesn't adequately prepare journalists for the physical, mental and emotional traumas they face while reporting.

In 2011, Kate was covering the civil war in Libya when her cameraman and husband Olivier Sarbil was hit by a rocket propelled grenade. It was a miracle that he survived. Kate spent the next 6 years surviving PTSD, tortured by

the knowledge that, as Olivier lay there blown to pieces on the back of a pick-up truck, she was unable to do anything; she couldn't recall her first aid training, who to call on the newsdesk, or even how to speak.

The trouble is, it's really hard to prepare for that in training. News organisations send journalists on three or five day hostile environment courses in the countryside where they are subjected to exploding fireworks and pretend kidnappings. These courses, and the basic premise behind them, have changed little since they began after the Gulf War. Some are decent and the first aid training is always useful, but they are highly militaristic and western centric.

Security managers and news directors freely admit that this style of training is no longer fit for purpose. Not only do journalists often resent having to do it, it simply does not reflect the diversity of newsrooms today, nor the breadth of new threats that journalists face.

Head Set is addressing this problem head on, providing a new way of training and better access to mental and emotional support for those who risk their lives doing dangerous work.

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Innovate UK and Innovate UK KTN have been with us every step of the way!

Kate Parkinson
Co-Founder
Head Set

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Head Set's Innovation Loan Journey

The Innovation Loan is allowing Head Set to develop new scenarios for journalists as well as humanitarians who also must prepare for frontline activities. In addition, the loan funding will bring to market a self awareness tool that helps participants regulate their emotions using real-time biometric feedback on fully mobile VR headsets. This will pave the way for more individualised and effective training programmes using immersive technology.

As a result of the Innovation loan Head Set has been able to hire a CTO, a Head of Operations and a Junior Developer. Head Set also plan to hire someone with experience in the humanitarian sector as they expand into their second tier market. Towards the end of the project period they will look to hire a salesperson to support commercialization.

Innovate UK & Innovate UK KTN's Role

With a Design Foundations grant Head Set were able to validate their idea that the way journalists are trained needs to change. They took a proof of concept virtual reality simulation to market with funding from a Smart grant. With the Innovation loan they are continuing their research and development of using real-time feedback, including biometrics, to increase self-awareness and help participants regulate their emotions during high stress moments, and will be expanding into new markets. Kate Parkinson is also a recipient of the Women in Innovation Awards 2021.

Head Set is a female-led business operating in two very male dominated industries - hostile environment training and immersive tech. Having a diverse point of view means Head Set is creating highly differentiated products which have the potential to radically disrupt the way people with high-risk jobs train and the way organisations think about preparing their staff for risk.

Connecting for
Positive Change.



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