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Meet a Team - Innovation Precinct

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by

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Who do you go to when you have a light bulb moment? To the Innovation Precinct of course!

This newest kid on the block – who live in a former Fire Station built in 1910 – formally opened its doors in April this year (<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/news/latest-news/2018/05/design-factory-melbourne-moves-to-renovated-fire-station.php>).

. They share a building space with Design Factory Melbourne and their incubator tenants – currently The Data Experience and Quitch.



The team

The Innovation Precinct team consists of seven key members – John Morrison (Executive Director), Elicia Wong (Director Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship), Lisian Teh (Director Commercial Innovation Programs), Sarah Byrne (Communications Advisor), Lillian Lowe (Executive Assistant), Heide Scholten (Administration and Events Officer), and Tommy So (Innovation Lead) who joins the team in October.

“While we each have our independent roles – which are critical to the broader team – being a small, agile team means it’s ‘all hands on deck’ to get things done,” says John Morrison, Executive Director.

“We are working in the startup space and so the team operates like a startup, with everyone helping out and sharing the workload. This provides a great opportunity for team members to learn from each other and develop their skill set in other areas.”



Working in a building that has a coworking space also creates great opportunity to think outside the box, collaborate, and do things differently.



Ventures and initiatives

With clients ranging from staff, students, alumni, and industry – anyone involved in Swinburne’s innovation ecosystem – the Innovation Precinct does its best to support everyone.

“We support our clients in many ways, which includes the opportunity to engage in our programs, masterclasses, pitch nights, as well as benefit from our facilities by using a hot desk or incubator space,” John says.



Venture Cup fever

A major initiative keeping the Innovation Precinct busy at the moment is the 2018

Venture Cup

(<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/events/departments/current-students/2018/09/venture-cup-2018.php>)

Venture Cup, which is open to staff, students and alumni, is a startup pitch competition that sees a winning team receiving \$20,000 in venture funding.

“It gives our team a great opportunity to seek out new ideas and see what is happening in the innovation space – and specifically within Swinburne’s innovation ecosystem,” says John.

“Venture Cup is a great opportunity for you to gain the skills and experience you’ll need to drive your start up towards success, so if you have an idea and keen to share it, come and [attend our events starting next week](https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/venture-cup-info-how-to-pitch-tickets-49418325542) (https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/venture-cup-info-how-to-pitch-tickets-49418325542)
”, John says.



We are passionate about diversity

An important initiative that the Innovation Precinct is working towards in 2019 is supporting women in innovation. This initiative is about building a diverse community, inclusivity, and supporting women through the innovation journey.

Successful startups are usually led by diverse teams with a range of skill sets. “This is what we are building into our ecosystem at Swinburne,” says John.



Why we love what we do

“We’re in a unique position of meeting people – both within our team and from outside – who come up with brilliant ideas and who engage in our programs. We are impressed by the quality of ideas coming through, and the excitement is palpable,” John says.

“The opportunity to think outside the box and do things differently is exciting. Working in a relatively new, agile team opens up opportunities to try new things and collaborate on

projects.”

For the team it means the opportunity to work with a range of stakeholders, which makes each day interesting. “We work on a variety of projects simultaneously,” John says. “For example, we’re currently supporting discussions between Swinburne and industry on using blockchain for supply management.”



What makes us special ...

While most university innovation hubs have been around for some years, Swinburne’s Innovation Precinct is one of the newest university-led innovation teams. This means the team has an opportunity to learn from other innovation precincts and hubs, and also create their own path and do things differently – to meet the needs of future markets and industry.

The Innovation Precinct is under the umbrella of Swinburne Research. As a result the Precinct has a strong focus on research-led innovation across Swinburne’s capabilities. “It makes us unique, when compared to other universities – this focus on research,” John says.



Putting fun into the mix

The team hosts a monthly lunch for the Swinburne Research team at the Fire Station. “Our lunches are usually themed, like a Christmas in July lunch, where the team enjoyed roast pork and crackling, apple sauce, baked potatoes, finished off with

Christmas cake, and Elf on the TV," John says.

Next week's lunch will be a footy themed event. Everyone in the Innovation Precinct team plays a role in putting the lunches together and it's always a hit with the Research team.

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