

ACU Co-Lab

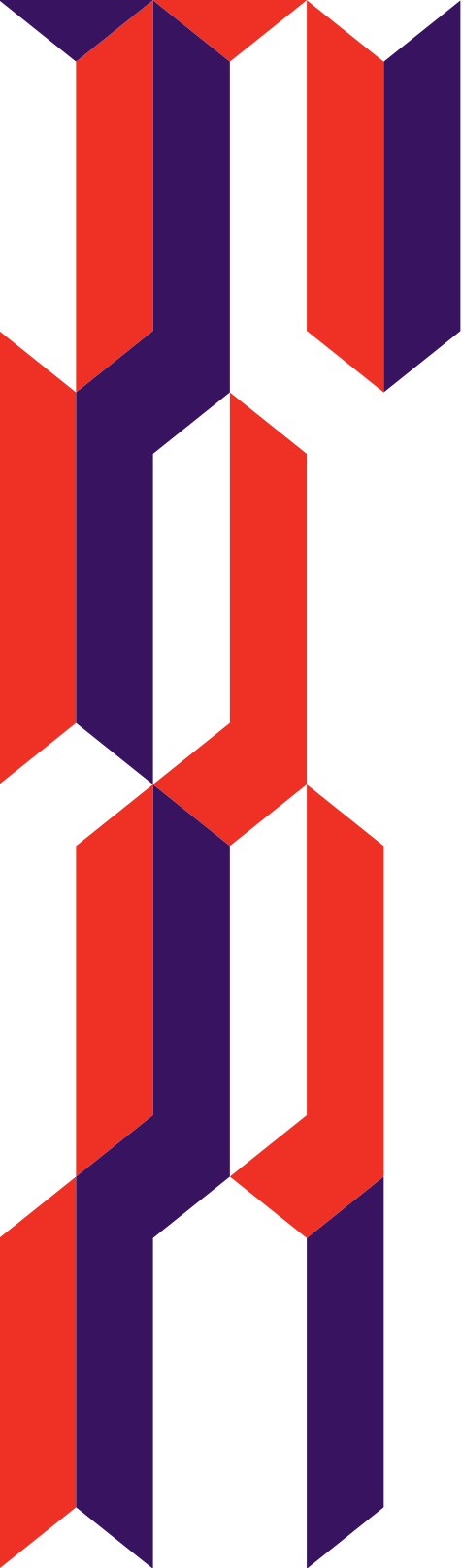
Building the next generation of ethical entrepreneurs





In this report we have documented the impact, the achievements and the real-world outcomes made possible through ACU Co-Lab.

It showcases entrepreneurs inspired, solutions brought to life and businesses launched, in service of ACU's Vision 2033 to create positive social impact through ethical leadership, enterprise and innovation.



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Community testimonials



THUSHIKA KULARATHNE

Student Social Enterprise Award winner

“Co-Lab not only enhanced my university experience, but it also opened up my eyes into a world of possibilities.”

KATHRYN WILLIAMS

ACU Careers Advisor

“We’ve been strong supporters of ACU Co-Lab since it started, and there have been so many different ways we’ve engaged with Co-Lab over the years. We’ve used their creative spaces for our Entrepreneurial U Workshops with students. We’ve used Co-Lab’s extensive network to source speakers for our staff conferences. We’ve directed students to Co-Lab for education programs and mentoring, and we’ve sourced entrepreneurs from Co-Lab to deliver real-world problems that students can work on.”

MUHAMMED IRFAN AND ARAFAT SAFDAR

Migrant Incubator Series participant

“The Migrant Incubator Series helped us not only to recognise our potential, but it also empowered us with the knowledge and connections needed to propel our business forward. It’s been an invaluable stepping stone on our path to revolutionising grassroots sports streaming in Australia and beyond.”

AVANTHA JAYASINGHE

Business Incubator Award winner

“Support from mentors and peers who genuinely care about making a difference encouraged me to think bigger, stay focused on our purpose, and tackle challenges with greater confidence.”

Our impact in numbers



1,722

ACU students, staff
and alumni supported

124

student work
integrated learning
(WIL) placements



743 jobs created by
Co-Lab hub startups
(including 60 paid ACU student jobs)

110+

industry/university
connections facilitated



15

pitch competitions



\$7.9 million

in funding raised by
Co-Lab hub startups

**\$3.1
million**

in grant income
generated by
Co-Lab



7,758

workshop/event
participants

408

startup events



About ACU Co-Lab

Our mission and purpose

ACU Co-Lab was established in 2017 to connect the university's mission of service and community with the fast-moving world of entrepreneurship. Since then, Co-Lab has become a catalyst for innovation, helping people turn ideas into real outcomes that make a difference.

OUR CORE OBJECTIVES:

- encourage students and staff to tackle social and industry challenges
- build partnerships that connect academia, business and community
- grow employability through enterprise and innovation skills
- strengthen the culture of innovation that supports ACU's Vision 2033.

OVERVIEW OF OPERATIONS

Since its inception, ACU Co-Lab has grown from its first co-working hub in North Sydney into a nationally recognised innovation ecosystem. It now operates vibrant hubs in North Sydney, Strathfield and Melbourne, and delivers hybrid and virtual programs that engage participants from across Australia.

The Co-Lab team works closely with faculties, researchers and industry mentors to create learning environments that are practical and collaborative. Our key offerings include entrepreneurship education programs, student and industry pitch competitions, work integrated learning connections with industry, co-working business hubs and research commercialisation support.

IMPACT METRICS



\$3.1 mill

IN GRANT INCOME
GENERATED BY
CO-LAB



Learn more
[acu.edu.au/
co-lab](https://acu.edu.au/co-lab)

Triple E Award

ACU Co-Lab was honoured as the Innovation and Collaboration Space of the Year at the 2024 Triple E Asia-Pacific Awards, which celebrate excellence in entrepreneurship and engagement across higher education globally.

The team also received the People's Choice Award in the same category, reflecting strong community recognition of Co-Lab's impact.



The Triple E Awards (Entrepreneurship and Engagement Excellence in Higher Education) are administered by the Accreditation Council for Entrepreneurial and Engaged Universities and recognise institutions that lead through innovation, engagement, and real-world impact.

These awards affirm ACU's growing reputation in the entrepreneurship space and position the university as a strong national competitor alongside Australia's leading universities.



“ACU's Co-Lab is a leading example of our university's commitment to building thriving communities. Since 2017 Co-Lab has demonstrated its high economic impact in local and national communities, as well as the growth in community collaboration across seven years of operations.”

Professor Abid Khan

ACU Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise



Learn more
[asia-pacific2024.
triple-e-awards.
com/finalist/
id/865](https://asia-pacific2024.triple-e-awards.com/finalist/id/865)

Funding Partners

In addition to the considerable and ongoing support provided by Australian Catholic University, ACU Co-Lab has also been awarded substantial state government funding through major innovation and commercialisation programs in both New South Wales and Victoria.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Boosting Business Innovation Program (BBIP)

ACU Co-Lab is a delivery partner in the NSW Government's \$11 million, four-year Boosting Business Innovation Program, working with 12 publicly funded research organisations to help small to medium enterprises (SMEs) translate research into commercial outcomes by strengthening collaboration, building innovation capability and supporting research commercialisation.

NSW TechVouchers Program (BBIP)

The NSW TechVouchers program enables SMEs to partner with university researchers to translate knowledge and inventions into new products and services, strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship capability, and accelerate the commercialisation of research and high-growth technologies.

Innovation Districts Challenge

The Innovation Districts C19 R&D Challenges program brought together the NSW Government, universities and CSIRO to accelerate the commercialisation of research-based solutions through a series of targeted challenge statements. Delivered through a network of innovation districts, it connected 11 NSW universities and CSIRO with startups and businesses to translate research into new products and services.

VICTORIA

LaunchVic University Pre-Accelerator Program

ACU Co-Lab is supported by LaunchVic to deliver university-based pre-accelerators that strengthen the early-stage startup pipeline. The program supports students and researchers to develop startups and minimum viable products (MVPs), grows the pipeline of technology-based university spin-outs, and builds entrepreneurial skills, networks and commercial capability across the ecosystem.

IMPACT METRICS



\$2.44 mill

BBIP GRANT INCOME



\$275,000

NSW TECHVOUCHERS GRANT INCOME



\$125,000

INNOVATION DISTRICTS CHALLENGE GRANT INCOME



\$252,000

LAUNCHVIC GRANT INCOME

Funding partners



BBIP program and NSW TechVouchers



launchvic

University Pre-Accelerator Programs

Meet the team



GINA D'ALBORA

Project Coordinator

Leads the operations of the North Sydney hub, manages the co-working community, and builds partnerships with academics and industry.



ANTHONY BAYSS

Senior Project Officer

Oversees program delivery and strategic development, leading the coordination of Co-Lab's Western Sydney hub and major national initiatives.



BIJO THOMAS

Program Coordinator

Organises and facilitates NSW program activities, ensuring the smooth operation and growth of the Co-Lab unit.



SHIRLEY PHAM

Startup Program Officer

Coordinates and supports the successful delivery of ACU's Startup Pre-accelerator Program, which is funded by the LaunchVic University Pre-Accelerator Program Grant.



Connect with
Co-Lab on LinkedIn
[linkedin.com/
showcase/
acu-co-lab](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/acu-co-lab)

Entrepreneurship education

Co-Lab Incubator Series

The Incubator Series has been Co-Lab's flagship program for developing entrepreneurial skills and confidence.

Program delivery partners



Delivered at scale while being supported by personalised mentoring, it has helped participants explore ideas, test opportunities and create real value. Designed jointly by industry specialists and ACU academics, the series reflects real-world practice across areas such as migrant entrepreneurship, disability inclusion, social enterprise and startup creation.

Workshops focus on practical foundations including understanding customers, shaping value propositions, applying marketing essentials, navigating funding and intellectual property and developing strong storytelling skills. Each series concludes with a pitch event where participants present their ventures to industry judges and receive valuable feedback.

IMPACT METRICS



5,222
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



994
ACU STUDENTS, STAFF AND ALUMNI SUPPORTED



152
HOURS OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT DELIVERED

Co-Lab Incubator Series metric snapshot

BUSINESS INCUBATOR SERIES

- 172 attendees
- 100% of participants likely to attend another Co-Lab workshop
- 96% of participants satisfied with workshops
- 96% of participants found the workshops useful

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SERIES

- 278 attendees
- 100% of participants likely to attend another Co-Lab workshop
- 97% of participants satisfied with workshops
- 93% of participants found the workshops useful

MIGRANT INCUBATOR SERIES

- 227 attendees
- 98% of participants likely to attend another Co-Lab workshop
- 96% of participants satisfied with workshops
- 96% of participants found the workshops useful

CIRCULAR ECONOMY INCUBATOR SERIES

- 535 attendees
- 96% of participants likely to attend another Co-Lab workshop
- 95% of participants satisfied with workshops
- 98% of participants found the workshops useful

TESTIMONIAL

"The speakers were generous. The feedback was honest. The community gave me clarity, courage, and a renewed belief in social enterprise as a tool for justice and inclusion."

Ratu Nida Farihah

Social Enterprise Incubator participant



Learn more
acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/our-programs

Startup Pre-accelerator Program

The Startup
Pre-Accelerator
Program helps early-
stage founders in
Victoria turn ideas into
viable ventures.

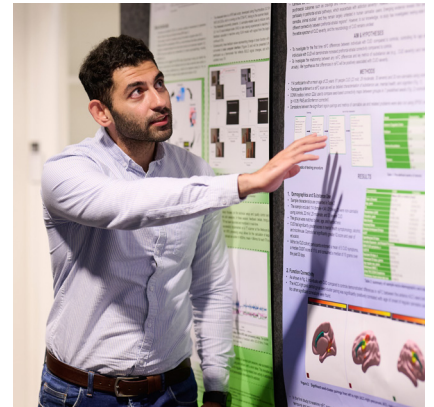
Program partners

DISRUPTORS
co



Delivered with industry partners and funded by LaunchVic, it supports ACU students, staff, researchers and alumni to validate ideas, build early products and strengthen their capability through expert mentoring and practical startup development.

The program concludes with a Demo Day where participants pitch to investors and industry leaders. It has become an important pathway within ACU's entrepreneurship journey, connecting emerging founders with further opportunities through the Co-Lab Incubator Series, industry partners and the university's broader commercialisation initiatives.



Learn more
[acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/
our-programs/startup-pre-
accelerator-program](https://acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/our-programs/startup-pre-accelerator-program)





Community business hubs

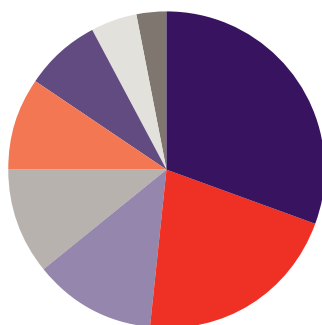
Co-Lab co-working hubs provide an accessible environment for innovative thinkers including students and alumni, as well as startups and small and medium enterprises.

These spaces encourage collaboration supported by modern facilities and networking opportunities. Members can connect with like-minded founders, access expertise and participate in programming designed to help ideas grow into real-world ventures.



Learn more
acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/startup-services

INDUSTRY/SECTOR DIVERSITY



- 32%** Technology and digital innovation
- 22%** Education, skills and learning
- 13%** Health, wellbeing and care
- 11%** Social impact, community and
- 10%** Consulting and professional services
- 8%** Industry and creative
- 5%** Finance and business services
- 3%** Sustainability and environment

IMPACT METRICS



658
 ENTREPRENEURS SUPPORTED



743
 JOBS CREATED BY CO-LAB HUB STARTUPS (INCLUDING 60 ACU STUDENTS)



\$7.9 mill
 IN FUNDING RAISED BY CO-LAB HUB STARTUPS



growth. I would love to continue being a part of this amazing community.”

Kayla Caruso, Founder and Managing Director, Music Lessons Australia and ACU student



and they put in a lot of work to assist the small businesses.”

Tania Mastroianni, Founder and Director, Business with a Heart

“This co-working-lab is perfect for businesses just starting out as it gives you access to networking, advice and a supportive community that genuinely wants to see you succeed. The team is fantastic,

Hub success stories

LEOR



Leor began as a one-person startup when founder and ACU alumna Andrea Christie-David discovered ACU Co-Lab as a supportive home for her early childhood education and disability service. Co-Lab provided Andrea with a professional space to work, hold meetings, and build her team during the crucial early stages when every dollar matters and community is everything. Through this connection, Andrea also engaged ACU students who gained practical experience while contributing to the organisation's growth.

After joining the Co-Lab community, Leor expanded to around 40 staff, developed collaborative partnerships across ACU, and strengthened its industry visibility. This growth ultimately led to a major milestone: the company was acquired by G8 Education Limited, one of Australia's largest early childhood education providers, in a transaction valued at almost \$10 million. Andrea credits her ongoing relationship with Co-Lab as a key part of her entrepreneurial journey, supporting her from launch through to successful exit.

"The ACU Co-Lab space has been so beneficial for my business. Being able to have a space that I could come to and work by myself, as well as meet other people in my team, and then also the workshops and the courses that the space offers. It just means that you can connect with other people going through a similar journey."

Andrea Christie-David,
Managing Director, Leor, ACU graduate



Video interview
[youtube.com/
watch?v=K-
Cr5_3y0AY](https://youtube.com/watch?v=K-Cr5_3y0AY)

Australian International Sports Organisation (AUSISO)



Co-founded by ACU alum Nicholas Toscan and business partner Herman Lotey, Australian International Sports Organisation (AUSISO) uses sport to create social change. AUSISO has grown significantly during its time with ACU Co-Lab. What began with two founders has expanded to a team that now includes four full-time staff and more than 100 casual employees delivering sport and wellbeing programs across New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Queensland.

This rapid growth reflects a strong demand for community sport initiatives and the organisation's ability to scale impact nationally. AUSISO has been part of the Co-Lab community since early 2019, using the shared hubs at Strathfield and North Sydney and actively engaging in workshops and development activities.

The organisation has also provided valuable industry placement experiences to more than 75 ACU students since 2018, with many progressing to paid roles within its workforce.

"I would absolutely recommend Co-Lab. It's a fantastic opportunity and space to work in. We've grown our business [and] we've been able to have our staff members come in and work productively and efficiently in a centralised space. For me, as a former ACU student, it's fantastic to come back and be working here full-time and be supported by the university once again."

Herman Lotey (left), co-founder, and **Nicholas Toscan** (right), Co-founder, Australian International Sports Organisation, and ACU graduate



Video interview
[youtube.com/
watch?v=2u
Vv6EuN-Nc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=2uVv6EuN-Nc)

Internships with industry

Co-Lab works closely with ACU's Work Integrated Learning team to connect startups and innovative businesses with students seeking real-world experience.

These placements bring fresh skills into growing ventures while helping students build career ready capabilities. From business improvement projects to longer term talent development this approach supports both workforce growth and student success.

IMPACT METRICS



124

STUDENT PLACEMENTS

TESTIMONIALS

"[The students] demonstrated outstanding expertise in developing a comprehensive business plan and meticulously crafting multiple business artefacts. Their ability to leverage transferable skills beyond their core disciplines allowed them to create something truly valuable for us."

Chris Anthony
CEO, Skillojo



Learn more
[acu.edu.au/
locations/co-lab/
startup-services](https://acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/startup-services)

"The relationship between the business chambers and the ACU Internship program is an amazing bond of getting experience and then receiving the opportunity for paid work. ACU interns have always impressed with their quality and have been showcased at our chamber events. Thank you ACU for your support and quality of these placements."

Andrew Hill
North Sydney Business Chamber





Community Lunch and Learns

ACU Co-Lab's Lunch and Learn sessions highlight the expertise in our own entrepreneurial community.



Each session is delivered by a community expert or academic who shares practical knowledge drawn from their business journey, helping early-stage founders build confidence in areas such as marketing, funding and sector-specific skills.

With close to 4,000 entrepreneurs connected to ACU Co-Lab across Australia, these one-hour online sessions tap into a wide range of industries including education technology, social services, marketplace platforms, health and wellbeing, and clean energy.

IMPACT METRICS



41

LUNCH AND
LEARN SESSIONS



680

PARTICIPANTS



Learn more
[acu.edu.au/
locations/
co-lab/events](https://acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/events)

Pitch competitions

Co-Lab has delivered 15 pitch competitions showcasing emerging innovators from ACU and the wider community.

These events provide a platform for student entrepreneurs and local organisations to present impactful ideas to panels of experienced academics and industry leaders. Entrants are recognised for creativity, problem solving and the strength of their story, which helps great ideas gain visibility and momentum.

TESTIMONIALS

“This competition has allowed me the opportunity to showcase the institutional adoption of QuantumGuard with future interoperability in mind. The Student Business Idea competition is an amazing program.”

Liam New
Co-Lab Student Business Idea
Award winner

IMPACT METRICS



15
PITCH
COMPETITIONS



239
PITCH
ENTRIES



Standout industry pitch winners



TIM ENGLISH (LEFT) AND TOM CLARKE (RIGHT)

Disability Incubator Award winners

Tom and Timothy's pitch was for their client app, Metaboly, which provides clients with ongoing guidance on exercise and dietary plans. Their clinically supported treatment is easy and fun to stick to. It teaches clients how to manage their condition and keeps them connected to their clinicians.

"One of the obstacles when starting a health tech company can be navigating the complex web of health care regulations and subsidies. The Co-Lab Disability Incubator provided us with valuable insight on how these factors affect clinicians and clients."



RATU NIDA FARIHAH

Social Enterprise Award winner

Ratu, a dedicated Co-Lab community member, transformed her lived experience into a powerful force for change through her venture, Women's Lantern. This grassroots social enterprise supports migrant women and survivors of domestic and family violence through trauma-informed care, solar skills training and dignified income pathways.

"From day one, it felt like a space where your lived experience wasn't a deficit to hide, but a powerful source of change. More than anything, it made me feel like I wasn't building this alone."



Learn more about Ratu

acu.edu.au/about-acu/news/2025/july/acu-co-lab-member-wins-social-enterprise-award

Standout student pitch winners



KYLA TUCKER

Business Idea Pitch Award winner

"Being able to develop this idea into a physical product was a dream come true for me. The competition allowed me to share my ideas and challenge myself to make it the most successful product it could be."



THOMAS CLARK (LEFT) AND XAVIER CHALKLEY (RIGHT)

Social Enterprise Pitch Award winner

"The Social Enterprise Pitch Award has been invaluable to our business. This grant enables us to enhance our program and expand its reach to more schools, particularly those that typically lack the funds and resources to participate in such initiatives."



HANNAH SOPHIA LUKAS

Co-Lab Social Enterprise Pitch Award winner

"Taking part in the competition was a really empowering experience. I've never seen myself as someone who naturally belongs in the world of pitching or business. It always felt a bit outside of what I do. But working on this idea and sharing it in that format showed me that it's absolutely possible to think about social change not just in theory, but in terms of actionable design."

Research commercialisation support

Skill development

Co-Lab's skill development programs and impact have gone beyond the student and Co-Lab business community.

To support ACU's research agenda and the research community, Co-Lab partnered with industry experts to facilitate the delivery of workshops to support researchers to increase industry engagement and industry income, and to channel commercialisation efforts in pursuit of new opportunities.

These commercialisation focused programs have been delivered in partnership with industry organisations including Campus Plus and Cruxes Innovation.

IMPACT METRICS



221

RESEARCHER PARTICIPANTS



65

HOURS OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT



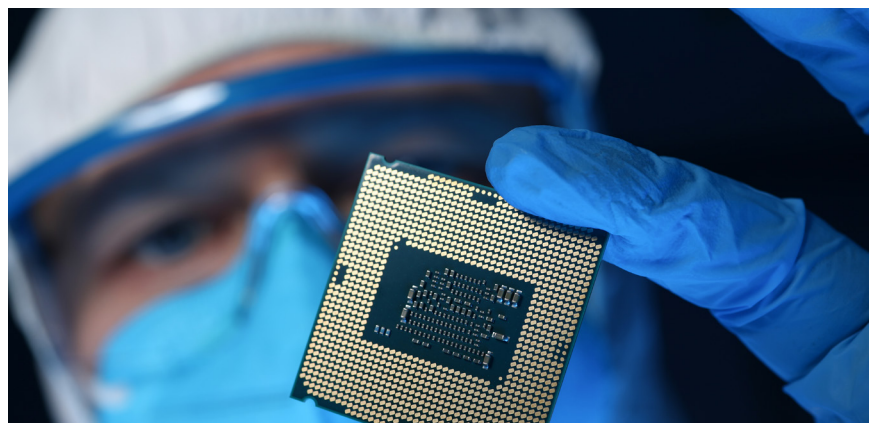
50+

WORKSHOPS



NSW TechVouchers

Co-Lab enables small and medium enterprises to collaborate with ACU researchers through the NSW TechVouchers program, which provides matched funding of up to \$50,000 to support the commercialisation of new products, technologies and services.



The facilitation of the TechVoucher grant program is enabling ACU to showcase our strengths in delivering research that is both innovative and ethically grounded, while still delivering real-world impact.



Learn more
[acu.edu.au/
locations/co-lab/
nsw-techvouchers](https://acu.edu.au/locations/co-lab/nsw-techvouchers)

IMPACT METRICS



\$300,000

IN RESEARCH
REVENUE
GENERATED



3

PROJECTS
FUNDED

NSW TechVoucher Projects



LLM-BASED AI PRICING FOR FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE CONTRACTS

Lead Researcher:

Associate Professor Walayat Hussain,
Faculty of Law and Business.

Project:

Development of a Large Language Model-powered pricing tool that supports more accurate and transparent public procurement through industry partner Tendertrace's platform.



GLUCOSE LOWERING EFFECTS OF A MULTI-INGREDIENT PLANT-BASED TONIC

Lead Researcher:

Professor Leonidas Karagounis,
Mary MacKillop Institute for
Health Research.

Project: Coordination of a clinical trial to evaluate a plant-based tonic created by SME Mrs Toddy's Tonic that may offer a natural, food-based solution for managing post-meal blood sugar levels.



QUANTIFYING THE ACCURACY OF A MARKERLESS MOTION CAPTURE SYSTEM FOR ASSESSING HUMAN MOVEMENT:

validation of the PeakMedical application for assisting in exercise physiology prescription

Lead Researcher:

Associate Professor Grant Duthie, Sports Performance, Recovery, Injury and New Technologies (SPRINT) Research Centre.

Project:

Validation of health tech startup PeakMedical's motion-capture system to assess its accuracy for home-based joint disease rehabilitation.

Got a question?

Contact us

We're here to help

Email: Co-Lab@acu.edu.au

Visit: acu.edu.au/co-lab



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co-lab](https://acu.edu.au/co-lab)



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