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## **UCT student tech start-up offers technology and entrepreneurship skills to students**

A team of University of Cape Town (UCT) students have come together to form a start-up company, Zaio. The start-up assists student developers build an information technology skills profile through coding challenges and practical experience, hopefully helping them to ultimately land their dream job. At the same time, the Zaio platform provides other start-ups with access to affordable web and app development.

Zaio was formed in October 2017, when student developer Thando Hlongwane realised that one of the biggest issues he faced was not really having any practical experience.

Hlongwane explained: "Guys like Mvelo, who are aspiring entrepreneurs, were finding it very difficult to prototype and create innovations, because it's really expensive to build tech."

The team comprises of seven students: Mvelo Hlophe, Thando Hlongwane, Mhlahli Xozwa, Harjot Singh, Akhil Boddu, Ntuthuko Mpaku and Asif Hassam, all of whom have an interest in technology and entrepreneurship.

Technology, and especially web and app development and coding, is often seen as a male-dominated space. The only woman on the Zaio team, Xozwa, who is the finance and community lead, is actively trying to get more women involved with the platform.

"We are trying to engage more women and bring more people of colour into this space. We want to make this tech-driven space more inclusive. That's at the core of our business," said Boddu.

They began turning their attention to introducing things like coding challenges and company tours, to broaden the experiences of developers as they try to build relevant industry skills.

Once a project has been identified, individual developers are grouped together in what Zaio calls clusters. Then, under the direction of a project manager, they build out the necessary prototypes.

“Someone who comes to Zaio might ask us to build out a prototype. This is normally an entrepreneur or a start-up. If that’s the case, we will deploy a team of developers. These people are now competent enough to build out a prototype for a start-up,” Boddu added.

There is however an alternative approach.

“Another way is that they’re simply looking for manpower – they’re looking for more developers to come on board to help them in their start-up. We are also currently working with corporates who are looking for developers to recruit.

Because we are upskilling all of these developers, we have created this development journey and ecosystem and we can easily provide developers to companies,” Boddu concluded.



*The faces behind Zaio are (back from left) Mvelo Hlophe, Thando Hlongwane, Asif Hassam, Mhlali Xozwa, (front from left) Ntuthuko Mpaku, Akhil Boddu and Harjot Singh.*

**ENDS**

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