UK's first LGBTQ+ angel syndicate launches with a packed house at 22 Bishopsgate and a £100,000 first investment

Monday 26 October, 2026

- 140 LGBTQ+ founders and investors filled Cooley's City offices for Come Out & Connect, the first event of The Gay Investor Network (The GIN)
- The GIN announced its first investment on the night: £100,000 into Atlian, the AI company for construction insurance brokers, founded by serial entrepreneur James Buckley-Thorp, in a pre-seed round led by Fuel Ventures
- Research by Proud Ventures found three in four UK LGBTQ+ founders are not comfortable sharing their identity with every investor they meet. The GIN exists to change that
- Built in twelve months, self-funded by founder Mark James, with a team of professional investors working unpaid

The Gay Investor Network, the UK's first UKBAA-accredited angel investment syndicate for the LGBTQ+ community, held its launch event on Wednesday 21 October at 22 Bishopsgate, hosted by law firm Cooley. 140 founders and investors attended, with standing room only in the theatre, and the network used the night to announce its first completed investment.

A first investment: £100,000 into Atlian

The GIN's members have invested £100,000 in Atlian, a London AI company whose software spots every construction project in Britain from the moment it is planned and puts it in front of the brokers who insure it. The pre-seed round was led by Fuel Ventures, alongside SyndicateRoom's Access EIS and angel investors including Chris Mairs CBE, co-founder of Metaswitch.

Atlian's founder, James Buckley-Thorp, started his first business with £40, built it into a Sunday Times Fast Track 100 company and sold it in 2016. He went on to found Bequest, Britain's first life insurance app, and was an early team member at Zego, Britain's first insurtech unicorn. He was named a Gaingels Top 100 global VC-backed founder in 2024.

Why the network exists

Research by Proud Ventures found that three in four UK LGBTQ+ founders are not comfortable sharing their identity with every investor they meet, and a quarter would not share it with any investor at all. The same report found gay male founders raised 22 times more than lesbian founders, and cis men 2.5 times more than cis women and 10 times more than trans founders. Mark James, who founded The GIN after 25 years in business and a decade as an angel investor, felt he had to choose how much of his identity to show in investor meetings while building his previous company.

The GIN was set up so that LGBTQ+ founders can pitch to investors who understand them, and so that LGBTQ+ professionals with capital have a route into angel investing. The syndicate has screened over 100 pitches and made its first investment within six months of the syndicate opening for pitches.

The network has also launched SIX, a free six-month course for people who have never invested before, built on the principle that angel investing should not be reserved for the wealthy. The GIN's LinkedIn group has more than 2,000 members.

The launch night

Come Out & Connect brought 140 LGBTQ+ founders, investors, lawyers and fund managers together at Cooley's offices at 22 Bishopsgate. A panel on building a more inclusive venture ecosystem featured Anna Colombatti of Diversity X Ventures, Harry Briggs of Astanor Ventures and James Buckley-Thorp of Atlian, chaired by Peter Wozny, Head of Legal at Btomorrow Ventures and a member of The GIN team. The evening included West End performers and drag artists from X&N Live, and goody bags filled entirely with products from LGBTQ+-founded businesses.

Everyone involved in the night, from the organising team to the photographer and performers, gave their time for free. The network has been self-funded by its founder throughout its first year, with no marketing budget.

Media:





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The Gay Investor Network :: The GIN :: LGBTQ+ Angel Investors :: Angel Syndicate :: LGBTQ+ Founders :: Atlian :: Fuel Ventures :: Cooley :: UKBAA :: Come Out & Connect :: Proud Ventures :: LGBTQ+ Investment :: Angel Investing UK ::

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What comes next

The GIN is looking at expanding across the UK, with angel hubs planned in Brighton, Manchester, Cardiff and Edinburgh. Its aim is to become one of the largest and most diverse angel syndicates in the UK.

Mark James, founder and Syndicate Lead, The Gay Investor Network, said:

"Three out of four LGBTQ+ founders in this country are not comfortable sharing their identity with every investor. A founder who spends their time editing their own story is bad for business and bad for returns. The GIN exists so that every founder and investor can be comfortable showing their true selves.

"We wanted our first investment to show exactly what our members can back: a founder who has done it before, going after a huge market that technology has barely touched. Atlian is that company. And we wanted our first event to show what this community looks like when it gets together."

James Buckley-Thorp, founder and CEO, Atlian, said:

"It was easily one of the best networking events I've been to in a long time. Mark is building a great community with The GIN, and I'm proud that Atlian is its first investment. Construction is one of Britain's biggest industries and one of the last still insured by phone, email and PDF. Having investors behind us who understand both the opportunity and the founder matters."

Russell Anderson, Partner, Cooley, said:

"It was a pleasure to host The GIN's first event and we look forward to supporting and collaborating with the network as it grows."

ENDS

Notes to editors

Photos: high-resolution event photography by Harry Kinnaird Photography is at https://thegin.uk/come-out-connect-photo-library/. Press access: enter photos2110@thegin.uk at the gate. Photos are free to use with the credit "Harry Kinnaird Photography". Atlian headshots and logo: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VY2f56EbkfBjuO40bjCBKU1r6q8sqSQs

Interviews: Mark James and James Buckley-Thorp are available for interview, in person or by phone, radio and podcast.

The panel: Anna Colombatti, Diversity X Ventures; Harry Briggs, Partner, Astanor Ventures; James Buckley-Thorp, Founder and CEO, Atlian. Chaired by Peter Wozny, Head of Legal, Btomorrow Ventures.

Event partners: hosted by Cooley at 22 Bishopsgate. Goody bags sponsored by Zeno alcohol-free wines and Mella 1809, with products from Shokolá, Vieve, Madame F, Abracadabra+ and Ruck, all LGBTQ+-founded businesses. Entertainment by X&N Live.

About The Gay Investor Network

The Gay Investor Network (The GIN) is the UK's first UKBAA-accredited angel investment syndicate for the LGBTQ+ community, run by GI Network Ltd. Its network of around 3,000 LGBTQ+ investment professionals invests together in early-stage UK companies, and its SIX course brings first-time investors into angel investing. The GIN was founded in 2025 by Mark James, a serial entrepreneur with 25 years in business and a decade as an angel investor. https://thegin.uk

About Atlian

Atlian is a London AI company building software for the UK's independent construction insurance brokers. Every building in Britain. Before it exists. atlian.ai

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