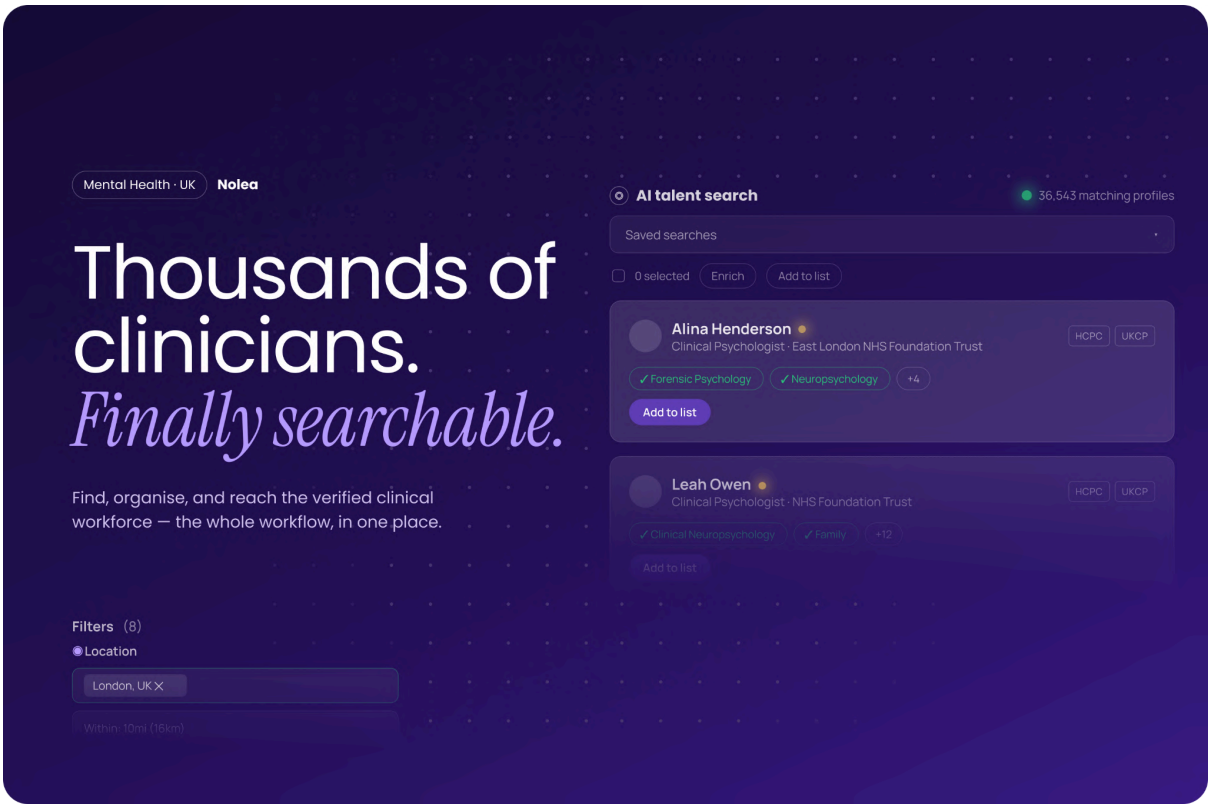
NOLEA

From Design Craft to Product Strategy

UX/UI Designer ⟶ Product Owner · HealthTech Startup · UK · 2+ Years

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$1.2M Seed Funding · £10K/month Priory Pilot · Google Black Founder Winner · On Deck Accelerator



Section 1 — The Hook

Headline

From Design Craft to Product Strategy — Building the Tool That Found the Hidden Healthcare Workforce

Subheadline

A 2-year journey at Nolea: from UX/UI Designer to Product Owner, helping pivot an early-stage healthtech startup toward $1.2M in seed funding and paid contracts with the UK's leading mental health providers.

Role Overview

Company	Nolea — Mental Health Workforce Intelligence, UK
Duration	2+ years
Roles	UX/UI Designer ⟶ Product Owner
Industry	HealthTech / Mental Health / SaaS
Scope	End-to-end design, design system, user research, product ownership, sprint management

Opening

The UK health sector had a workforce problem hiding in plain sight. Thousands of licensed clinicians — verified across registers like GMC, NMC, HCPC, and GPhC — were practically invisible to the employers who needed them most. Nolea was built to close that gap. I joined as a UX/UI Designer and, over two years, grew into the Product Owner role — helping shape not just how the product looked and felt, but what it became after a pivotal moment in testing changed everything.

Headline Outcomes

- $1.2M Seed A funding secured from Frontline Ventures and Calm/Storm Ventures
- Priory Group pilot - 12-month paid contract at £10,000/month with the UK's largest mental health provider
- HelloSelf - 6-month paid contract · leading UK digital mental health platform
- Royal Devon NHS Trust - 3-month pilot
- Google Black Founder Program winner
- On Deck Global Accelerator selected

Section 2 — Context & The Problem Space

The Market Gap Nobody Was Talking About

The UK mental health sector has one of the most regulated and credentialled workforces in healthcare. Clinicians - psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, nurses, pharmacists, doctors, mental health nurses and many others - must be registered with one of several national bodies: the GMC, NMC, HCPC, GPhC or the relevant for each role, before they can legally practise. On paper, this means there is a known, verifiable pool of qualified professionals. In reality, the picture was far more fragmented.

Employers - private clinics, NHS-adjacent providers, mental health platforms, were struggling to find and reach those clinicians. The registers confirmed they existed. But knowing someone is licensed to practise and actually being able to find and contact them are two very different things. LinkedIn had patchy coverage of this workforce. Specialist job boards surfaced only the active job seekers. The majority of the eligible talent pool was effectively invisible.

This was the gap Nolea was founded to close.

The Original Idea: A Two-Sided Marketplace

The initial model was a classic marketplace play. On one side, companies would post detailed job briefs - salary, location, working hours, specific clinical requirements. On the other, clinicians would create rich profiles - specialisms, years of experience, qualifications, availability, and preferences.

As the UX/UI Designer on a small team of five people, this is where my work began - translating that two-sided model into user flows, onboarding journeys, and interface designs that made both experiences feel intuitive and worthwhile.

What the Pilots Revealed

Early pilot projects with major UK clinics put the brief-matching feature directly in front of the people it was built for. The feedback was clear and consistent: the matching wasn't landing the way the team had hoped. What did capture their attention was something else entirely - the ability to search the wider workforce directly, surfacing clinicians who had never engaged with Nolea at all.

The realisation was significant. The most valuable clinicians - the experienced, in-demand practitioners that companies most wanted to reach - were precisely the people least likely to sign up to a new platform. They weren't looking. They didn't need to be. The real opportunity was finding them anyway.

Section 3 — Role & Team Structure

Phase 1 — UX/UI Designer

When I joined Nolea, the product existed largely as an idea with early-stage validation. My job was to turn that idea into something real, usable, and trustworthy — for two very different types of users simultaneously.

What I owned:

- User flows & journey mapping — mapping the end-to-end experience for both clinicians and companies
- Customer experience maps — documenting emotional and functional journeys for each user type
- Research interviews & user testing — validating design decisions and surfacing usability issues early
- UI implementation in Figma — translating flows into high-fidelity, developer-ready designs
- Design system — creation and governance, actively maintained with the development team
- Brand & social visuals — website, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram assets
- Rebranding post-pivot — redesigning Nolea's visual identity, website, and social presence to reflect the new product direction, resulting in stronger brand trust and improved market positioning with enterprise clients
- Design for Growth programme — structured weekly tasks formalising and improving design processes, running concurrently with live product work

Phase 2 — Product Owner

As the pivot took hold and Nolea's direction sharpened, the CEO recognised that the product needed tighter structure around delivery and decision-making. My deep familiarity with the product, the users, and the company's direction made the transition a natural one.

What I owned, additional to the mentioned above:

- Sprint creation and management in Jira — structuring two-week delivery cycles
- User stories and epics — writing clear, actionable stories with precise acceptance criteria
- Backlog prioritisation — balancing customer feedback, business urgency, and technical feasibility

- CEO collaboration — daily standups and brainstorming sessions anchoring decisions to business goals
- Competitor analysis — mapping adjacent tools including HeroHunt.ai
- Feature ideation sessions — exploring product expansion mapped to customer pain points
- Product roadmap ownership — creating and maintaining the roadmap, overseeing execution and QA of shipped features
- Sign-up monitoring — tracked a doubling of weekly profile completions (from 3–4 to 7–8 per week) following LinkedIn campaigns and CEO outreach, using Hotjar to monitor user behaviour and identify critical bugs between production and testing environments

What This Dual Role Actually Meant

The transition from designer to Product Owner wasn't a clean handover — it was an accumulation. The design thinking didn't stop when the PO responsibilities began. I wrote better user stories because I had designed the flows. I made better design decisions because I understood the backlog constraints. I could prioritise the backlog with conviction because I had sat with users and understood what friction actually felt like.

This is the thread that runs through both phases: a consistent, user-grounded perspective applied at progressively higher levels of product responsibility.

> *'Kristina shaped both how Nolea looked and how it was built. She designed the product through a major pivot, and her product judgment - knowing what to build, what to cut, and why - kept the team moving in the right direction."*
>
> **— Richie Dawes, CEO & Founder, Nolea**

Section 4 — The Product Shift

Phase 1: The Original Marketplace

Research: Both Sides of the Marketplace

Before any flows were drawn or screens designed, I ran research interviews with both clinicians and clinic HR and hiring managers. The CEO was also a key internal voice throughout, bringing the business perspective into early design decisions.

From clinicians, the research surfaced a consistent tension: they were open to new opportunities, but deeply resistant to lengthy, complex onboarding. Trust was a recurring theme — sharing detailed professional information with an unfamiliar platform required confidence that data would be handled appropriately.

From HR and hiring managers, the picture was different. They were time-poor, process-driven, and frustrated. They didn't just want to post a job and wait. They wanted to search, filter, and reach out directly.

The Three Core Flows

1. Clinician Onboarding Flow

The flow was designed around progressive disclosure — breaking profile-building into logical, digestible stages rather than presenting one overwhelming form. Each stage was framed around a clear value exchange: the more you share, the better your matches. Visual progress indicators, contextual help text, and a save-and-return capability were built in to reduce abandonment.

2. Company Job Brief Creation Flow

For the company side, I designed a structured brief builder with smart defaults and optional depth — a hiring manager could complete a basic brief in minutes, or invest more time to add specificity that would improve match quality.

3. Search & Discovery Flow

This flow became the most consequential of the three — because it was the one that survived the pivot. Initially designed as a supplementary feature, the deep search quickly emerged during pilot testing as the functionality companies actually wanted to lead with.

The Design System

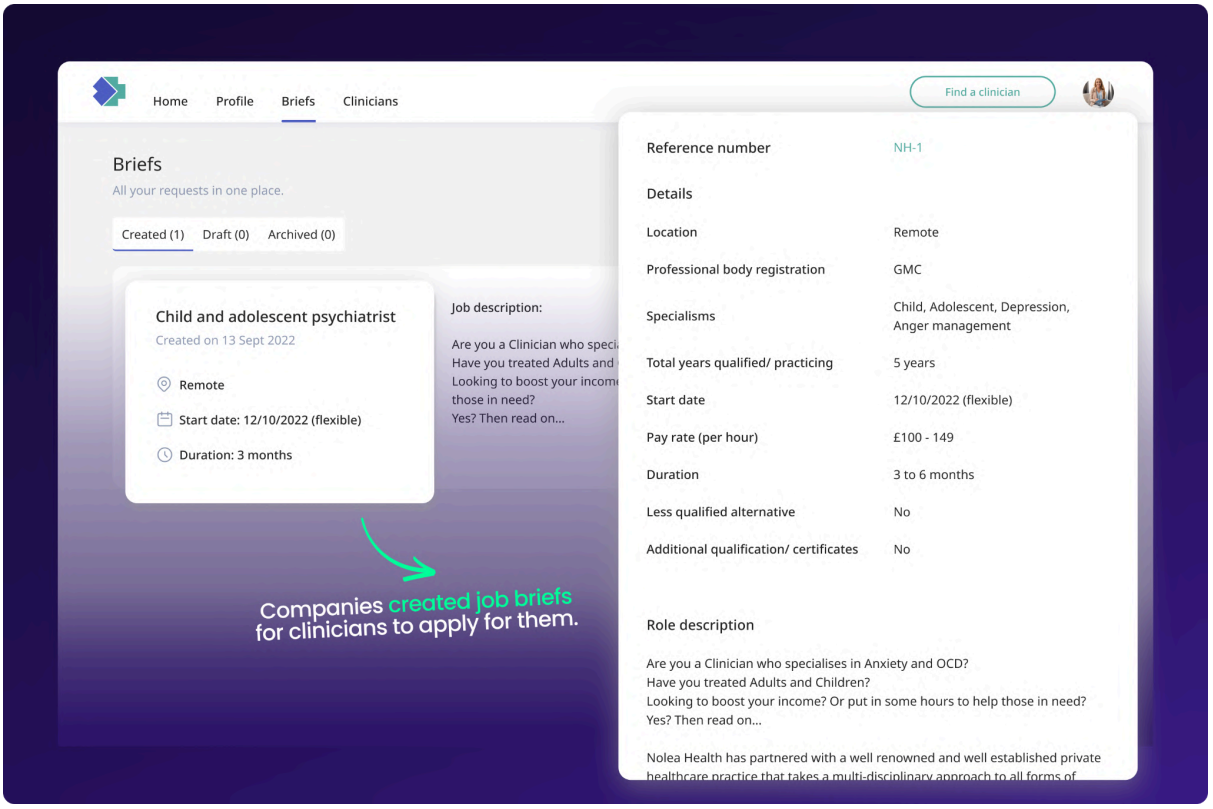
With three major flows, two user types, and a small development team moving fast, consistency was a genuine risk without deliberate infrastructure. I built Nolea's design system in Figma to give the product a stable, reusable foundation — covering core components, navigation structures, form elements, cards, buttons, typography scale, colour tokens, and spacing rules.

In a small startup moving at speed, a design system is what allows a team of one designer to maintain quality across an entire product without becoming a bottleneck.

The User Testing Moment

Pilot testing with major UK clinics put the brief-matching feature in front of real users for the first time. The findings were unambiguous: the matching wasn't resonating. But the search functionality was generating genuine excitement.

The research interviews had hinted at it. The search flow had always felt more immediately useful to the HR managers we'd spoken with. Seeing it confirmed through live pilot feedback made the pivot feel less like a disruption and more like the product arriving at its natural form.



Companies created job briefs and clinicians applied for them.
A classic job board, meant for mental health practitioners.

Phase 2: The Search Platform

After the pivot, the design process for the search platform ran differently — faster, more iterative, and driven by five overlapping research inputs simultaneously.

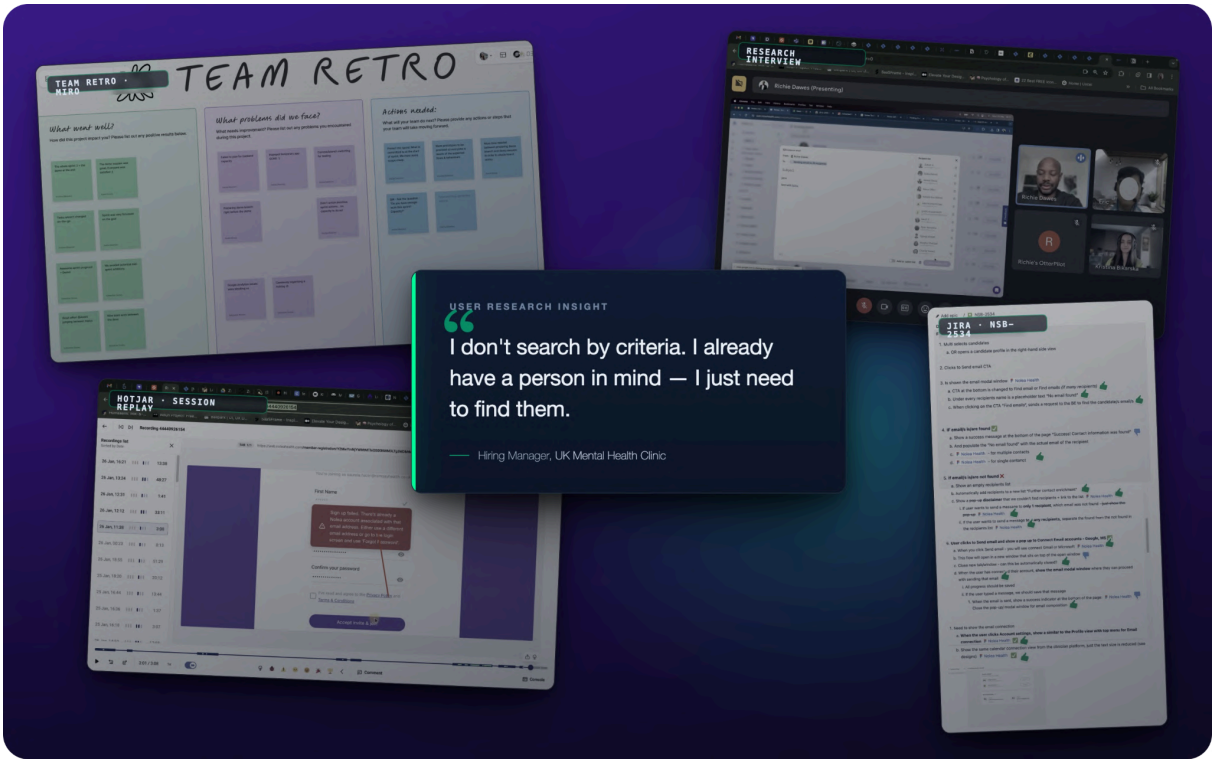
Research & Discovery

- Research interviews with hiring managers to understand how they currently searched and what frustrated them most
- Usability testing sessions on early designs
- Hotjar behaviour analysis tracking how users moved through the live product
- Direct feedback from active pilot customers
- Competitor analysis mapping how adjacent tools like HeroHunt.ai approached search UX and where they fell short

The clearest insight from that research: recruiters weren't thinking in filters. They were thinking about people. They would say things like, "I'm looking for someone similar to..." instead of listing five search criteria. That helped me realize the search experience needed to feel more flexible and less like filling in a form.

Design moved fast and directly into high fidelity — informed enough by research to skip extended wireframing. I worked in rapid prototyping loops with the CEO, pressure-testing design decisions against business logic before they reached the development team. The three surfaces I designed most deeply were the search results and filtering UI, the clinician profile card, and the talent lists — the core daily workflow for any hiring manager using the platform.

Live pilot feedback became the final design layer. Hotjar sessions with Priory and HelloSelf users revealed friction points that testing hadn't caught — small interaction failures between production and testing environments, drop-off moments in the talent list flow, and confidence gaps around how incomplete data was being presented. Each finding fed directly back into the next iteration.



Hotjar sessions, Jira board view, retro notes, and hiring manager pull-quote

Section 5 — The Pivot

Six Months In: The Product Listens

Within the first six months, pilot testing with major UK clinics had produced a clear verdict. The brief-matching feature wasn't generating the enthusiasm the team had hoped for. Not because it was broken, but because it was solving the wrong half of the problem. Companies weren't struggling to describe what they needed. They were struggling to **find** who could deliver it.

The UK's major clinical registers collectively hold records for hundreds of thousands of licensed practitioners. These records confirm that a clinician is qualified and legally permitted to practise. What they don't contain is anything that makes those clinicians findable or reachable — no email addresses, no phone numbers, no LinkedIn profiles, no indication of whether someone is open to new roles.

The gap between registered and reachable was vast — and for employers, it was costly. The most experienced, in-demand clinicians weren't browsing job boards or filling in marketplace profiles. They were working. They weren't looking.
The deep search feature was the one generating genuine excitement in the room.

The CEO's Call — and Why It Was the Right One

The decision to pivot was the CEO's. It was made quickly, clearly, and with conviction. For me this felt right. The research interviews we had conducted with HR and hiring managers had already surfaced their frustration with passive, post-and-wait recruitment. Their language throughout had been about finding people, not attracting them.

Impact Of The Pivot

1. Shifted the product from a traditional hiring marketplace into a workforce intelligence tool focused on helping recruiters discover and understand hidden talent.

2. Moved recruiters from manually managing candidates across spreadsheets and disconnected tools into a centralised workflow for searching, evaluating, and organising talent.

3. Created a foundation for enterprise adoption by focusing on the workflow recruiters actually needed.

What the Pivot Meant for the Design Work

1. Dropping and deprioritising brief-matching

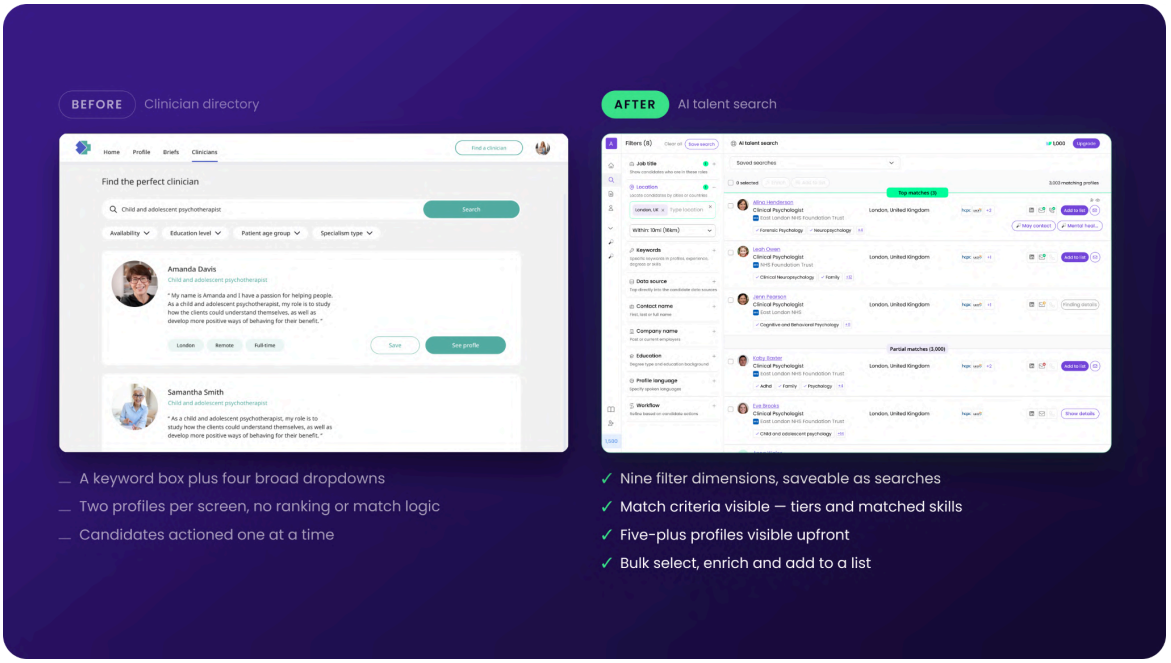
The job brief creation flow I had designed was shelved. That's a meaningful thing to sit with as a designer: work you invested in becoming a stepping stone rather than a destination. The right response is to treat it as sunk cost and move forward.

2. Rebuilding user flows for the new direction

The search and discovery flow moved from supporting features to core products. New flows were needed for how **companies** would interact with search results, save and organise candidate profiles, and action outreach.

3. Shifting how we communicated the product externally

Nolea's external presence — website, social channels, marketing assets — had been built around the marketplace proposition. I redesigned and rebuilt the visual communication of the product to reflect the new direction: workforce intelligence, not job matching.



Original clinician directory vs after-pivot AI talent search

> *"Kristina shaped both how Nolea looked and how it was built. She designed the product through a major pivot, and her product judgment — knowing what to build, what to cut, and why — kept the team moving in the right direction."*
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> **— CEO / Co-founder, Nolea**

Section 6 — Key Decisions and PM work

Key Decision 1 — Pivot the Product

Pilot testing showed brief-matching wasn't resonating. Deep candidate search was. The CEO made the call. My reaction was immediate: this felt right. The hiring managers we had interviewed had been pointing at the direction of finding people, not attracting them.

Key Decision 2 — Getting the results right was the work

The search functionality was our main focus, and most of that effort went into what showed up first. Two things made it hard. Profiles were being added and enriched daily, with information scraped from different sources — so the same field could arrive in five different formats and had to read as one consistent thing in the UI. And the ranking itself wasn't always transparent: results came back, but we couldn't always explain why a particular person was at the top. Recruiters trust a list they understand. That kept us iterating on the results layer longer than on anything else in the product.

The PM Work

Design decisions were only half the job. The other half was deciding what got built at all, and in what order — with a small engineering team, a live pilot in progress, and a roadmap that had to hold up under real commercial pressure.

1. I owned the roadmap

I kept track of what was coming next and why, and made sure we didn't drift from it week to week. But the plan bent to evidence more than once. We shipped email outreach basic first, with templates planned for later — then customer feedback showed how much time recruiters lost rewriting the same message, so templates moved up.

The harder version of that: for a while we focused heavily on search, because it was the core flow and I wanted it to be the strongest part of the product. Meanwhile recruiters kept asking for more from talent lists and we kept pushing that back. I didn't notice that trade-off as quickly as I should have.

2. I ran delivery and QA

Two-week sprints in Jira, scoped against what the team could actually ship. I wrote the user stories, and the acceptance criteria mattered more than the format — what shows when a search returns

nothing, what happens when a record is incomplete. Answering those before the sprint started is most of what kept us from redoing work. I also tested features before they shipped; I'd written the criteria, so I was the one checking we'd met them.

3. I worked with the CEO daily

He brought commercial urgency — investor expectations, client pressure, what needed to be true for the next pitch or renewal. I brought user and delivery reality — what recruiters actually needed, what the team could realistically ship. Most decisions landed between those two positions.

4. I kept an eye on the market

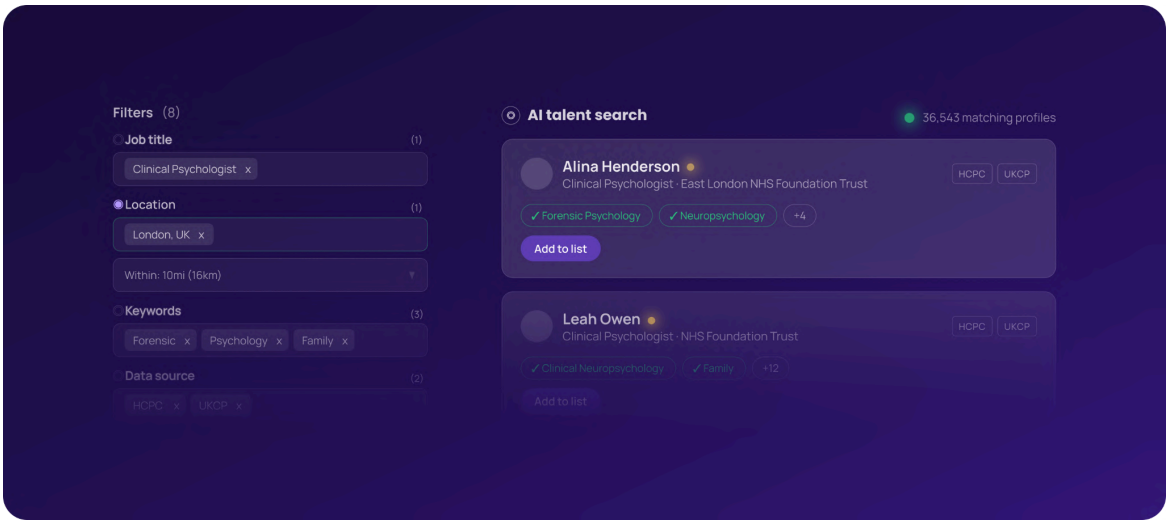
Ongoing analysis of adjacent tools, including HeroHunt.ai, wasn't about copying features. It was a check that we understood where the market was heading and weren't solving a problem in isolation.

5. I prioritised ruthlessly for enterprise

With Priory Group, HelloSelf and Royal Devon NHS Trust in active pilot conversations, every sprint decision carried commercial weight. I prioritised using three inputs simultaneously: MoSCoW framing, customer feedback and CEO alignement.

Section 7 — The Final Solution

Nolea is a platform that lets healthcare recruiters search the entire UK clinical workforce — surfacing real, contactable people behind regulatory register records that were never searchable before. Recruiters can filter across millions of records to find exactly who they need, then open rich, continuously enriched profiles that pull data from multiple sources into a single, trustworthy view. Candidates can be saved into AI-powered talent lists that learn from a recruiter's choices and source similar people automatically, while a Chrome extension lets them add and enrich candidates directly from LinkedIn, directories, or their inbox as they work. Smart multichannel outreach then replaces hours of manual messaging and tracking with a single automated workflow.



Product Overview

1. Candidate Search & Filtering

Hiring managers could search through the UK clinical workforce — filtering by specialism, registration body, location, experience and other criteria — and surface real, contactable people behind register records that had never been searchable before. **Unlike LinkedIn**, which only surfaced clinicians who had chosen to be visible, or specialist job boards, which only showed active job seekers, Nolea reached the passive majority — the experienced, in-demand practitioners who weren't looking but were exactly who companies needed.

The challenge

Search had to run across millions of records and return results fast. But speed wasn't the only problem. When recruiters searched too explicitly, layering in every criterion they had in mind, queries slowed down and often returned nothing at all. A zero-result screen with no explanation is

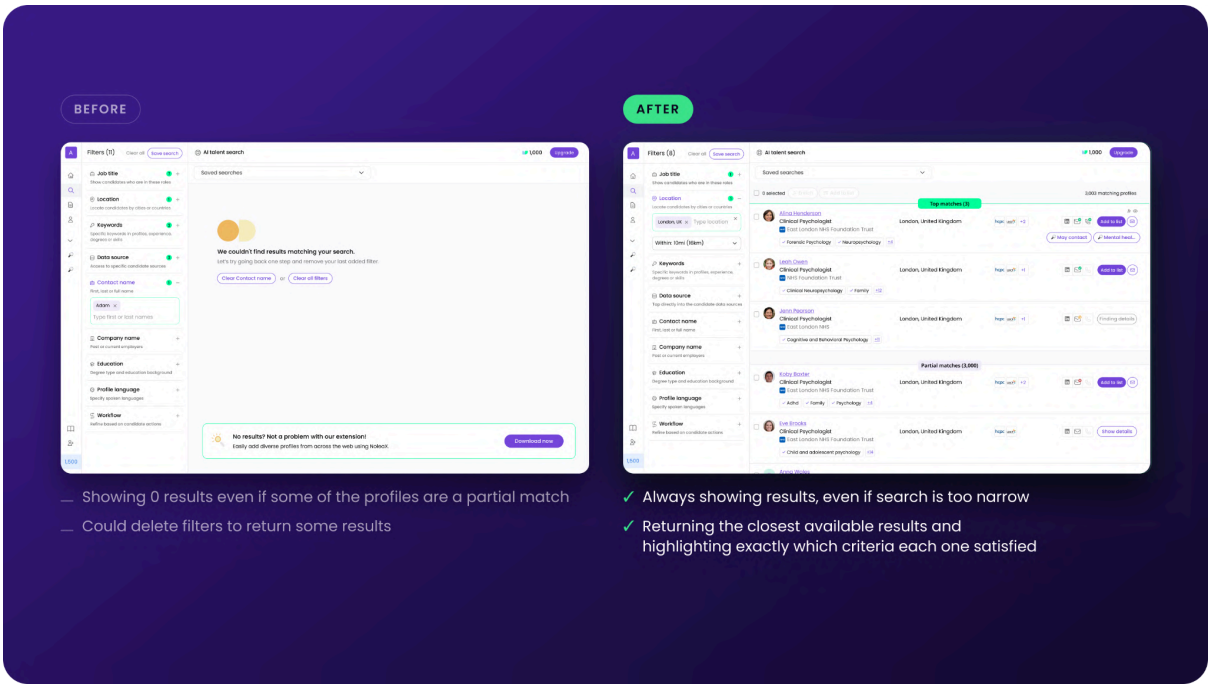
one of the most frustrating states in any search product: the user has no idea whether they've asked for something impossible, made a mistake, or hit a system failure.

How we solved it

Significant backend work went into query performance. On the design side, I moved the product away from binary match/no-match logic toward partial matching with visible reasoning — returning the closest available results and highlighting exactly which criteria each one satisfied. A recruiter searching for six attributes and finding candidates who matched four could see that clearly, judge relevance themselves, and adjust from there. The system stopped saying "no" and started saying "here's what's close, and here's why."

How we measured it

This was our core flow, so it was tested continuously rather than at milestones — running live search queries as a standing part of the process. Daily Hotjar monitoring was the most valuable signal: watching real session recordings let us identify problem queries and failure states directly, and we resolved several issues before any customer raised them.



Improving search by always showing results and highlighting matched criteria.

2. Clinician Profile & Data Enrichment

The profile card had one job: give a recruiter enough information upfront to know whether this was the right person, without requiring a single additional click. Every element on the card was there because it answered a decision-making question — is this person qualified, are they in the right location, do they have the specialism I need, and can I actually reach them.

The challenge

Creating a trustworthy profile was complex. Clinician data came from multiple sources — regulatory registers, professional listings, and online sources — each with different structures, formats, and levels of completeness.

The challenge was not only collecting data, but transforming inconsistent information into a single, reliable profile. In a regulated industry, unclear or incomplete information can directly affect hiring decisions, so transparency and trust were essential.

Because profiles were continuously enriched, we also had to consider how to communicate data freshness, distinguish verified information from inferred data, and handle incomplete records without reducing user confidence.

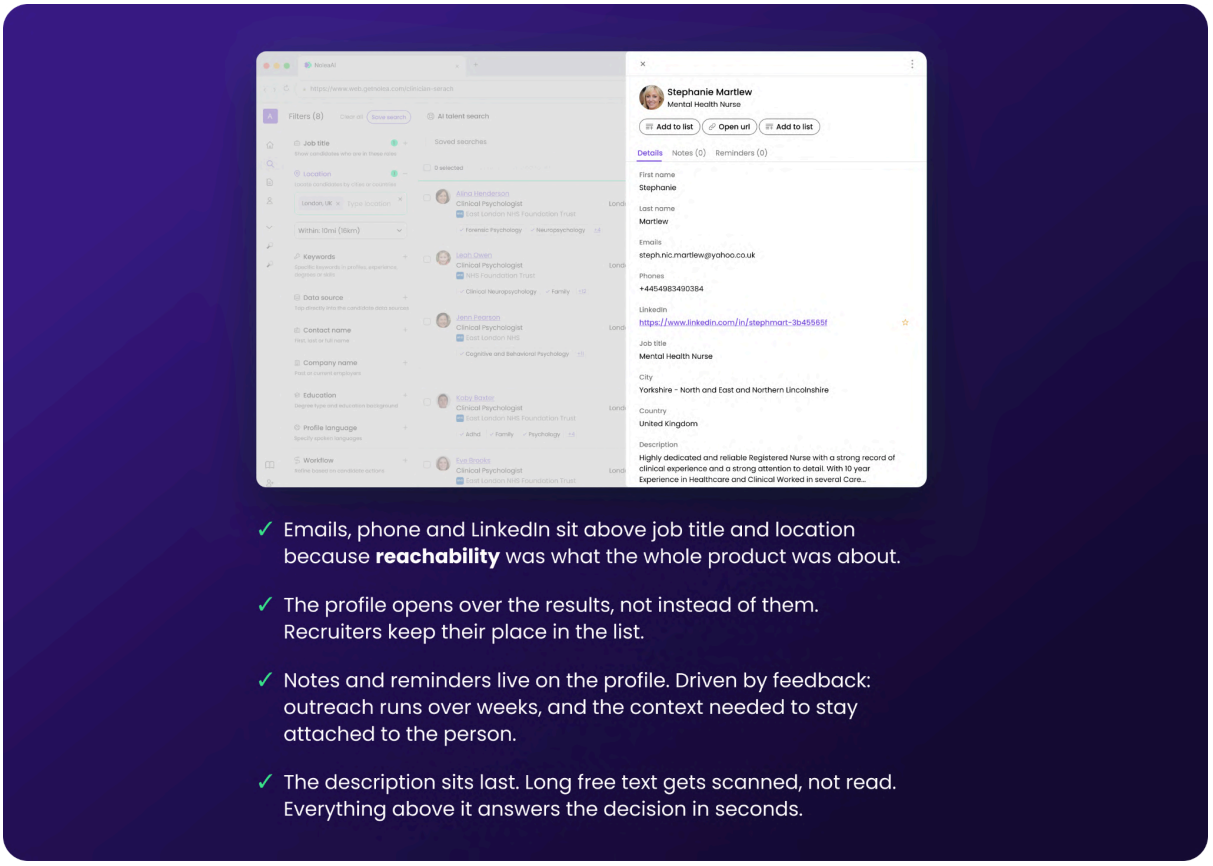
How we solved it

We created a profile structure that prioritised the information recruiters needed most when evaluating a candidate. Through testing with different recruiter groups, we refined the hierarchy, content, and level of detail to support faster decision-making.

The result was a profile experience that combined human expertise with continuously enriched data, helping recruiters evaluate candidates without switching between multiple tools.

How we measured it

We evaluated success through usability testing, looking for reduced friction in the decision-making process. The goal was for recruiters to confidently review a profile and take action without needing additional verification or searching elsewhere.



Candidate's profile card layout.

3. AI-Powered Talent Lists

The most technically ambitious area of the product — and the one that generated the strongest pilot feedback. Talent lists began as a straightforward replacement for the manual Excel sheets recruiters were maintaining, but evolved into something more useful: a list that worked *with* the recruiter rather than just storing their decisions.

The challenge

Talent lists began as a replacement for manual Excel tracking, but the bigger opportunity was a list that worked *with* the recruiter rather than just storing their decisions. That raised a harder question than the technical one: an AI that adds candidates a recruiter didn't choose can feel intrusive rather than helpful, particularly in a regulated industry where hiring decisions carry professional weight.

How we solved it

The AI layer learned from patterns in what recruiters were adding — specialism combinations, experience levels, locations, career stages — and used those signals to source and automatically add additional candidates matching the same implicit criteria. Rather than requiring recruiters to articulate exactly what they were looking for through explicit filters, the system inferred it from their behaviour and did the sourcing work on their behalf.

This required careful design around transparency and trust. Candidates added by the AI were labelled distinctly from those the recruiter had chosen themselves — so at a glance, a recruiter always knew what was theirs and what the system had contributed. They could delete any suggestion.

How we measured it

The measurement here was qualitative. Not every suggestion was a strong fit, and we never claimed otherwise — but recruiters kept using the lists and kept the suggestions in them, which was the signal that mattered. The feature was working as a sourcing aid rather than a replacement for judgment, which was exactly the intent.

4. Smart Outreach (Multichannel Outreach functionality)

Before Nolea, outreach was almost entirely manual. Hiring managers composed messages one at a time, sent them individually, and tracked responses across scattered inboxes and spreadsheets. But now hiring managers could compose and send personalised messages to multiple candidates directly from the platform — no copy-pasting into email, no manual tracking of who had been contacted. For teams running high-volume hiring across a fragmented workforce, this collapsed what had previously been hours of manual outreach into a single workflow.

The challenge

On the design side, this feature came with unusually few unknowns. The user interviews had already surfaced a great deal of detail about how recruiters wanted to reach candidates and where the existing process broke down, so I had a clear vision for how the feature should work. The technical, development, and testing challenges, however, emerged after my time on the project — so I can speak to the problem and the design intent, but not to the engineering hurdles that came with building and releasing it.

How we measured it

This feature entered testing after my time on the project, so I designed and specified it but wasn't there for its release or the measurement of its impact. My contribution was the product definition and the design that carried it into build — the outreach concept, the multichannel flow and how it worked.

5. Chrome extension

Built around where recruiters already worked, it became one of the pilot's most-used features, with all four active Priory users relying on it daily. The Chrome extension lets recruiters add candidates to their talent lists directly from any website — LinkedIn, professional directories, or their inbox. The old workflow was fragmented and lossy: find a promising candidate externally, switch tools, search for

them again, try to locate contact information, and often lose the person entirely across a dozen open tabs.

The challenge

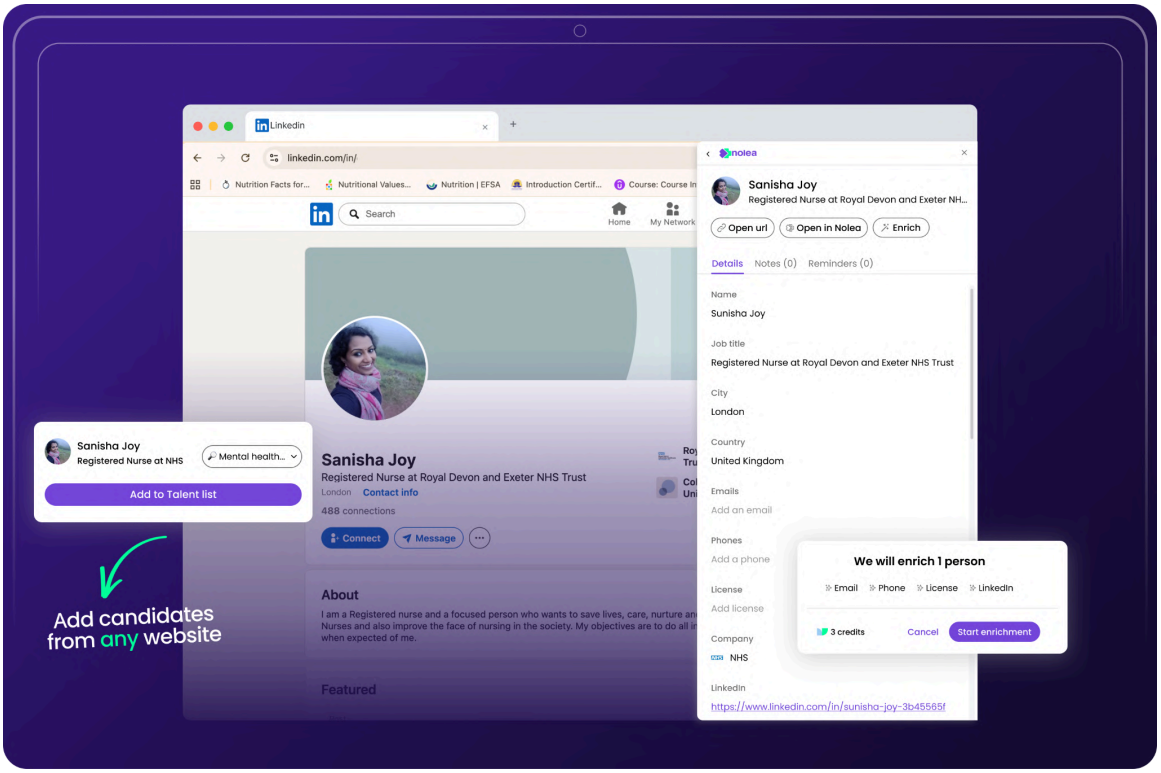
The technical challenge underneath was significant. The extension had to accurately scrape candidate information from a wide range of external sites, **each with different structures and formats** — and then enrich that data on the go, running verification checks in real time as the recruiter worked. Doing this reliably, at speed, without interrupting the recruiter's flow required extensive backend engineering.

How we solved it

To keep enrichment accurate, real-time verification checks ran the moment a candidate was added, validating contact information against other sources before it landed in the recruiter's list rather than after. Extensive backend work made these checks fast enough to happen invisibly, so the recruiter experienced a single click while a significant amount of validation ran behind the scenes..

How we measured it

Adoption during the pilots told the clearest story. At Priory, all four active users were using the extension daily. At HelloSelf, two of five recruiters adopted it. That contrast was as informative as the enthusiasm — it suggested the extension fit some sourcing styles far better than others, and pointed toward onboarding rather than the feature itself as the gap worth investigating.



One-click candidate capture and enrichment with the Chrome extension.

Section 8 — Outcomes & Validation

The Results That Proved the Direction Was Right

Everything in the previous sections — the research, the design system, the pivot, the sprint discipline, the user stories — was scaffolding. This section is what it held up.

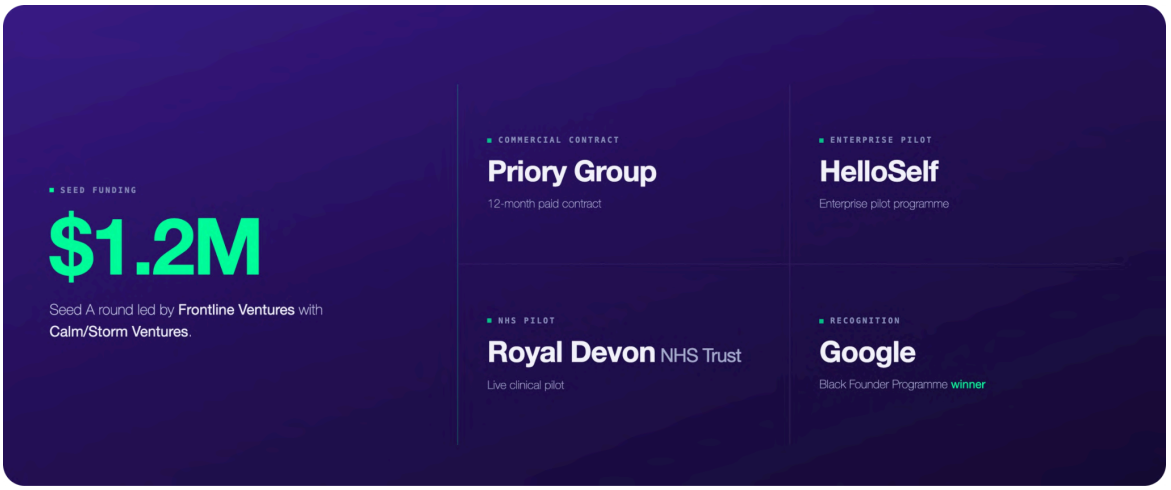
⭐**$1.2M Seed A Funding**	Frontline Ventures + Calm/Storm Ventures — post-pivot raise
Priory Group Pilot	12-month paid contract · £10,000/month · UK's largest mental health provider
HelloSelf Pilot	6-month paid contract · leading UK digital mental health platform
Royal Devon NHS Trust	3-month pilot
Google Black Founder Program	Competitive programme winner
On Deck Global Accelerator	Global accelerator — selected

My Contribution to These Outcomes

I designed all the **pitch decks** — translating a complex, data-heavy product story into a visually coherent, investor-readable narrative. I prepared **product demos and prototypes** that gave investors a tangible, interactive sense of what the platform could do. **And the product work itself** — the design system, the flows, the search experience — provided the credibility behind the pitch.

The qualitative feedback from Priory reflected what the research had always suggested: the value was in the discoverability. Being able to surface clinicians who weren't actively job-seeking, and reach them directly with relevant opportunities, addressed a gap that no existing tool had closed.

Weekly new profile completions doubled following the launch of LinkedIn campaigns and targeted CEO outreach — from 3–4 to 7–8 per week — tracked via Hotjar alongside live behaviour monitoring that surfaced critical bugs between production and testing environments before they affected enterprise clients.



The five key milestones — funding, pilot customers, Google

> *"She contributed directly to our investor pitch materials and helped us land and retain our first enterprise clients. The quality and consistency she brought across design, product ownership, and delivery was central to everything we achieved together."*
>
> **— Richie Dawes, CEO / Co-founder, Nolea**

Section 9 — Reflection & What I Learned

Reflection

Two years at a startup that pivoted within its first six months, secured enterprise clients, and raised over a million dollars in funding sounds, in retrospect, like a clear trajectory. It rarely felt that way from the inside. I can say at least a dozen of things that are my learning highlights but if I had to pick 3 of them, they would be:

1. Learning to Let Go of Work

The pivot happened fast. Features I had invested significant design thinking into were deprioritised or dropped entirely within weeks. The temptation when a pivot arrives is to defend the work. What I learned is that **the ability to release work cleanly** — to treat it as sunk cost rather than identity — is one of the most important skills a designer or product person can develop.

Work that gets set aside in a pivot isn't wasted. It's the groundwork that got you to the insight. Nolea's brief-matching flows **taught me how both sides of the marketplace thought** about value exchange. That understanding directly informed how I redesigned the search experience. Nothing was lost — but I had to stop holding on before I could use it.

2. Working at the Intersection of Design and Product

Learning to operate at the intersection of design and product ownership meant holding two different modes of thinking simultaneously: the user-grounded, detail-oriented mindset of a designer, and the outcome-oriented, prioritisation-driven mindset of a product owner.

A designer's instinct is to solve the problem completely. A product owner's instinct is to solve enough of it to deliver value now and build on it later. Finding the right balance between those two impulses is something I navigated daily at Nolea and carry with me as a core working principle.

3. Growing from Execution into Strategy

When I joined Nolea I was executing within a defined brief. By the time I left I was helping to define the brief itself: shaping what the product should do, in what order, for whom, and why.

That transition doesn't happen through a single conversation or a title change. It happens through accumulated context, earned trust, and a demonstrated ability to think beyond your immediate lane. Growing from execution into strategy is something I now understand as a deliberate practice, not a natural progression. You have to reach for the strategic conversation before you're formally invited into it.

What I Would Do Differently

If I could go back to the beginning of Nolea with everything I know now, **the one change I would make is to go deeper in the research phase, earlier.**

The signal about companies preferring search over matching was present in those early conversations. A more rigorous research phase might have surfaced, months before the pilot testing did — and potentially shaped the product's direction before significant development investment had been made in the brief-matching model.

Research is the highest-leverage activity in the early stage of a product. The instinct to move quickly into design and build can come at the cost of the insight that would have made the design more accurate from the start.

What Nolea Left Me With

- Release work cleanly. Attachment to outputs is the enemy of good product decisions.
- Build the infrastructure early. Design systems, documented patterns, and clear handover processes pay compounding returns.
- Research is never finished early enough. The cost of going deeper at the start is always lower than the cost of pivoting later.
- The best design decisions are strategy decisions. **The closer a designer sits to the business problem, the more valuable their craft becomes.**
- So many moments of pride — in how the team learned to work together, faster and cleaner over time, in every victory, every challenge, every conversation along the way.

What an amazing journey! 🥲