

PRESS RELEASE

DECEMBER 2017

ECRs WIN HEARTS AND DEMONSTRATE THERE'S NO DROUGHT IN INNOVATIVE THINKING

In its 22nd year YES welcomed the ten finalists to the Royal Society on Tuesday 12 December to present and showcase their business ideas in a bid to win the £13k prize fund.

YES17 saw all three competitions, Biotechnology YES, Engineering YES and Environment YES, bringing diverse fields such as healthcare, climate change, food security, engineering design, the digital economy and energy together.

The competitions are specifically designed to allow ECRs to develop commercialisation skills, raise career awareness and appreciate how their research can bring positive impact to society and the economy.

The teams were put through their paces at the regional heats in a bid to reach the final. Each heat takes place over three days giving them essential skills and advice to develop their hypothetical business ideas, in addition to networking with industry experts while improving their knowledge in key areas such as IP, finance and business development.

At the Royal Society, the finalists pitched their hypothetical companies to a panel of experts and held their own against a series of tough questions. One team from each strand, i.e. Biotechnology YES, Engineering YES and Environment YES, were chosen as the winners of their respective competition.

The winners of Biotechnology YES were CryoThaw from the University of East Anglia. Their company presented CryoThaw Heart: a game-changing solution that allows hearts to be cryopreserved and reanimated back to a viable state. This allows for extended storage times and improved post-transplantation outcomes for patients.

CEO of CryoThaw Lucka Bibic said: "For us, YES 17 has proven to be a fantastic networking opportunity as well as great (learning). Now we can apply and further develop these skills wherever our future career paths take us. We also fully believe that teamwork makes the dream work and this has been a vital aspect of our success in the competition!"

The winners of Engineering YES were mHealth WatchDog from Aston University. Their company developed the world's first implantable blood-test lab for continuous monitoring of key metabolites related to heart attacks, including troponin. Their powerful proprietary machine-learning algorithms analyse this data to predict a heart attack up to four hours in advance, allowing emergency services to intervene, evidently improving survival rates.

CEO of mHealth WatchDog Reham Badawy said: "YES was an amazing experience for us. The workshop broke down our perceived barriers about industry and has motivated us to seriously consider continuing our future careers in the entrepreneurship field."

Hygrow Ltd from the University of Nottingham won the Environment YES competition. Their company developed Chloroblast[®], a chemical that enhances crops natural protection against drought. It is sprayed onto the leaves before a drought to close the stomata early, retaining water and increasing the harvest yield.

CEO of Hygrow Ltd Rhona Savin said: "The YES experience was a fantastic opportunity that I ...would definitely recommend to all postgraduates. I have expanded my knowledge of business and can now see opportunities for both my own PhD and for my future career that I would never have considered before. Both the workshop and the final competitions were great experiences where we were able to meet a wide range of people from patent attorneys, to successful entrepreneurs, to leading industry experts. Winning Environment YES was just the icing on the cake!"

Many representatives from business and industry volunteer their time to act as speakers, mentors and judges for the competition. Through significant commitment to the aims and objectives of the scheme, these organisations recognise the importance of YES in providing the basis for the continuing success of the UK economy.

Dr Dave Hughes, Head of Crop Protection Technology Scouting and Opportunity Evaluation at Syngenta, said: "Supporting a culture of enterprise amongst ECRs is vital to our future prosperity. YES is invaluable for inspiring our researchers to become the next generation of leading innovators and entrepreneurs."

Dr Malcolm Skingle CBE, Director of Academic Liaison at GSK, commented: "This is a fantastic opportunity for ECRs to learn from those working in industry and to showcase their talent. Pitching ideas and solutions to an influential audience is invaluable experience as they look to take their career to the next level."

Professor Kev Dhaliwal, University of Edinburgh and Founder of Edinburgh Molecular Imaging, reflected: "As a YES alumnus I am delighted to support this initiative. The skills gained by the ECRs taking part will help them translate their research into economic growth. Laboratory research and innovative discoveries are impacting lives for the better in the UK and beyond. Congratulations to all the finalists!"

Professor Simon Mosey, University of Nottingham and Chair of YES, said: "This was the most exciting YES final I have had the privilege to attend. To see how our researchers used technologies like AI, biotechnology and 3D printing to fix the world was truly inspiring."

ENDS

Images

Pictures of finalists and more details available on request.

Further information

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Notes to editors

The competition receives financial support from Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), GSK, Medical Research Council (MRC), Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), P&G, Syngenta and University of Nottingham Haydn Green Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (HGI).

The following awards were also presented at the finals:

- Best consideration of financial planning strategy sponsored by James Cowper Kreston won by Pi² (University of Leicester)
- Best consideration of IP strategy sponsored by Potter Clarkson won by Pheromone Solutions (University of Liverpool)
- Best healthcare business plan sponsored by GSK won by Alauna Diagnostics (University of Reading)
- Best plant, microbial and environmental business plan sponsored by Syngenta won by Hygrow (University of Nottingham)
- Best innovative idea sponsored by The Haydn Green Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and by Potter Clarkson won by Circalis (National University of Singapore & A*Star)
- Best presenter award sponsored by The Haydn Green Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship won by Sophie Harrington of Active Plant Protection (University of East Anglia)
- People's choice award sponsored by Indigo won by CryoThaw (University of East Anglia)