



## News Release

### Shaping the Future: Innovation at the heart of YES24

Your Entrepreneurs Scheme (YES) is a competition that challenges participants to develop innovative solutions to address pressing global challenges. Celebrating its 29th year, YES24 brought together talented individuals to pitch their hypothetical business ideas.

This year's competition saw a wide range of visionary business plans, including a biotechnology solution that enhances soil health and increases crop yields through AI-driven microbial recruitment, a novel method for sustainable caffeine extraction that preserves coffee's natural flavour, and an innovative diagnostic test for endometriosis that offers a rapid, effective, and affordable solution. With over 6,500 participants since its inception, YES continues to inspire creativity and develop entrepreneurial skills among Master and PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and professional technicians. The competition also continued its focus on inclusivity, welcoming participants from diverse backgrounds, including professional technicians, who brought fresh perspectives to the pitches.

Throughout the autumn, participants engaged with industry-leading mentors and experts to refine their ideas, learn the intricacies of business development, and prepare their pitches. The top teams presented their ideas at The Royal Society in London on Wednesday 29 January 2025, competing for a prize fund of over £10,000.

Professor Malcolm Skingle CBE, Chair of the judging panel, remarked:

*"The quality of ideas and the depth of commercial thinking displayed by the finalists this year was truly exceptional. It's inspiring to see how YES continues to equip early-career researchers and technicians with the entrepreneurial mindset needed to translate cutting-edge science into real-world impact."*

Dr Sara Holland, Partner at Potter Clarkson, said:

*"As always, the standard of pitches and business plans was hugely impressive. Congratulations and good luck to everyone that took part - I'm sure YES will shape your future in one way or another."*

Dr Martin Wickham, CCO of Reacta Healthcare and YES alum, said:

*"The executive summaries presented this year were on par with, or even surpassed, those I encounter in the real world. It was a true honour for Reacta Healthcare to contribute to the development of these future science entrepreneurs."*



# Unleash your ingenuity

YOUR ENTREPRENEURS SCHEME

## Prize winners of YES24

The overall **winner of YES**, Terrain Solutions from the John Innes Centre, impressed judges with their innovative approach to sustainable agriculture. Their technology delivers hyper-potent, tailored biostimulants for row crops, significantly boosting yields. Using simple soil testing and their SoilSCOPE® AI model, they create customised formulations that recruit beneficial native microbes to crop roots—enhancing food security against climate change without the harmful effects of traditional pesticides and fertilisers.

In addition to winning the overall competition, the team also secured **Best sustainable agriculture business plan** sponsored by Syngenta, **Best executive summary** sponsored by Reacta Healthcare, and the **People's choice award** sponsored by Indigo Business Services Ltd. The team said:

*“The YES competition has been a highlight of our PhD journeys. The quality of mentorship and the taught webinars was exceptional, rapidly bringing us up to speed on business fundamentals. Participation in YES has also boosted our confidence, provided valuable networking opportunities, and illuminated fascinating careers outside of academia.”*

Winners of **Best healthcare business plan** sponsored by GSK was EndoNab from the University of Nottingham. The team won this prize for their groundbreaking proposal addressing healthcare challenges. Their novel and highly sensitive testing kit package recognises unique miRNA signatures for endometriosis from a simple blood test, offering a rapid, effective, and affordable diagnostic solution for an unmet medical need. The team said:

*“YES has been a fantastic opportunity to learn new business skills and view research through an entrepreneurial perspective. We have all enjoyed the journey, building EndoNab together as a team.”*

Winners of **Best disruptive food and drink business plan** sponsored by the Food Consortium Collaborative Training Partnership was awarded to Caffinity Biotech from the University of Leeds.

This team presented a new approach to sustainable caffeine extraction. They developed a genetically modified yeast strain with tailored enzymes to naturally break down caffeine during the fermentation process of coffee berries, optimising the decaffeination process while preserving coffee's natural flavour.

Vitamize, won the prize for **Best collaboration and teamwork**, sponsored by the Haydn Green Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Nottingham University Business School. The team made up of members from five different institutions: Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, University of Reading, Swansea University, and Quadram Institute – demonstrated exceptional cross-institutional collaboration.



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Their idea was an app, designed by medical professionals, that uses health questionnaires and an in-house computer modelling system to determine optimal supplement blends for a healthier lifestyle. The team said:

*"We have had the opportunity to develop extensive business skills and knowledge, and experience of working in the business world! We are also really grateful to have built strong friendships and connections as a team across the UK, supporting each other in an area we are all so passionate about!"*

FutureProof Skin, representing Sheffield Hallam University and UCL, won the **Best consideration of financial planning strategy** sponsored by James Cowper Kreston. Their idea was a technology that accelerates the ageing process of an individual's skin cells in the lab to forecast future outcomes and provide personalised, evidence-based skincare action plans. The team said:

*"YES24 has opened doors to new opportunities, pushing us beyond research to think commercially. The competition challenged us to apply our expertise to building a scalable business, and with expert mentorship, we've gained invaluable skills in business strategy and investment readiness. It's been an incredible journey for our team."*

A group of researchers from the Universities of Durham and Newcastle, DiagnosTree won the **Best consideration of IP strategy** sponsored by Potter Clarkson, with their tree-specific lateral flow device to detect the presence of disease-stemming fungi within trees, enabling rapid detection and removal of infected trees to prevent mass spreading.

The team also won the **Social media prize for active engagement**.

The team said:

*"YES24 has been a great experience to view various opportunities beyond academia. To explore and network within Syngenta in the semifinals and also in the Royal Society opened up possible future avenues for every member. We also developed our understanding on considering costings, profitability and intellectual property, as well as developing our public speaking skills."*



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## YOUR ENTREPRENEURS SCHEME

### A Platform for Growth

YES24 has once again proven to be a catalyst for inspiring entrepreneurial skills, networking opportunities, and innovative thinking. As Professor Simon Mosey, Director of the Haydn Green Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Nottingham University Business School, highlighted:

*“YES is more than just a competition; it’s a launchpad for researchers and technicians to develop entrepreneurial skills, gain commercial awareness, and build networks that can help turn ideas into real-world impact. Year after year, we see participants not only refine their ability to communicate complex ideas but also go on to create ventures, shape industries, and drive innovation within their fields.*

*By exposing researchers and technicians to the challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship, YES equips them with the confidence and tools to make a meaningful difference in the world.”*