

Supporting UK universities to develop international business

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Biotechnology Young Entrepreneurs Scheme gives researchers the edge reports
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Earlier this year, the “One Step Beyond” report called for a greater appreciation of the social and economic value that postgraduate education brings to the UK. It also hints at criticism of the narrowness of skills developed through traditional postgraduate study, which, the report says, leaves the UK’s highly skilled researchers sorely lacking in business awareness. In response, a review of the UK’s largest entrepreneurship competition for early career researchers in the biosciences – the Biotechnology Young Entrepreneurs Scheme (YES) - shows that we do have a successful model for addressing some of these concerns.

The review, commissioned by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) shows that Biotechnology YES – now in its 15th year and approaching a total of 3000 participants – leaves early career researchers well prepared to move into industry where their entrepreneurial skills are highly valued. It indicates that these skills are complementary to those acquired during a PhD, making these scientists very attractive to potential employers. There is also some evidence in the review to suggest that past participants perceive their earning potential as greater following the competition.

Participants said:

- “YES gave me the opportunity to demonstrate and develop skills that one rarely (if ever) gets the chance to develop during the progression of a ‘typical’ research PhD programme.”
- “Participating and being one of the winning team members changed my life: moreover, YES inspired me to start my own business.”
- “The workshop really opened my eyes to the world of commercialisation of sciences and has had a huge impact on my career since.”

Minister for Universities and Science David Willetts lent his support, saying “The UK leads the world in many aspects of the biosciences and it’s crucial we can translate discoveries into benefits for people’s wellbeing and innovations which equip UK businesses to compete in the global marketplace. That’s why I welcome schemes like Biotechnology YES. It offers important entrepreneurial skills to our next generation of talented scientists and technicians so they can exploit the results of their research and help the economy to grow.”

Biotechnology YES is an annual competition designed to raise awareness of commercialisation amongst early career researchers through the development of a hypothetical business plan. It was developed and is delivered through a long-standing partnership between the University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI) and BBSRC. The competition has attracted over 30 sponsors over the years from a range of organisations. GSK have been a sponsor for many years and their Director of External Science and Technology, Dr Malcolm Skingle, has praised the scheme saying “it is absolutely clear to us that the scheme produces some of the most talented business-minded scientists in the UK. It’s no surprise that they are in demand and doing well in their careers.”

The competition has grown year on year and the current round has more 100 teams entered, all encouraged to engage with their local Technology Transfer Offices. Additionally, there is a sister competition for researchers in India; a spin-off competition run by the Natural Environment Research Council, called Environment YES; and Newcastle University has integrated the scheme into their postgraduate continuing professional development programme. Professor Barry Hirst, Dean of Postgraduate Studies at Newcastle University said that the competition has been extremely valuable for their scientists. “We actually couldn’t think of a better way to equip our postgraduate scientists with top entrepreneurial skills”, he said.



BBSRC is very proud to be associated with the continued success of Biotechnology YES, a competition which leverages significant external backing and is helping shape the next generation of bio-entrepreneurs.

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