

Converting research into commercial reality

A spin-out company from the University of Warwick picked up a top prize of £25,000 in the Research Councils' Business Plan Competition in December. Of the seven finalists, two of the teams were in the area of bioscience.

Warwick Warp is developing a unique software-based fingerprint identification system which is substantially more reliable and also faster than those currently available. Warwick Warp's technology can be incorporated into identity cards and biometric passports – and so could help combat crimes such as identity theft, social security fraud, people trafficking and terrorism.

Minister for Science and Innovation, Malcolm Wicks, said, "I congratulate all those short-listed for the competition because many of them have developed potentially winning ideas for areas which are crucial to our economy, our health and quality of life.

"Innovation depends on taking research right through to become fully-fledged marketable products and services. Competitions like this which help mentor and develop people to market and sell their research can only help us in striving to boost innovation in the UK."

The bioscience prize went to Dr Valerie Ferro from the University of Strathclyde, who is developing platform technology for the oral delivery of vaccines that can pass through the stomach without being digested.



Dr Valerie Ferro with BBSRC Chairman, Dr Peter Ringrose.

Biotechnology YES competition

A team from Rothamsted Research were named best budding biotechnology entrepreneurs after winning the national final of a business plan competition in London last month. The young scientists walked away with prizes including £1,000 after impressing judges with their hypothetical business plan for a company called Phytofend. The team 'sold' their product, called SlugFast – a genetically modified Hosta plant, naturally attractive to garden slugs, which is proven to be a highly effective means of slug control.

Biotechnology Young Entrepreneurs Scheme (YES) is an annual competition organised by BBSRC and the University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI). This year 51 teams, comprising 248 individuals, were whittled down to eight finalists through a series of regional heats where they were able to draw on advice from mentors with experience in enterprise, innovation, patent law and equity investment.

Category prizes were also awarded to the Rothamsted team, as well as teams from the Institute for Animal Health, Imperial College London, and the University of Manchester.

This was also the first year of the spin-off competition Environment YES, supported by the Natural Environment Research Council. Environment YES was won by a team from Cranfield University with their hypothetical company Green Switch. Their product harnessed scientific breakthroughs to convert farmyard waste into electricity efficiently.



The winning team, from left to right: Dan Godfrey, Neryssa Glithero, Ben Webster, and Stephen Pearce

CONTACT

Dr Andy Cureton BBSRC

email: andy.cureton@bbsrc.ac.uk