

Biotechnology YES spreads its wings

A second Regional Development Agency (RDA) has joined in the entrepreneurial awareness-raising competition, Biotechnology YES, where early-career scientists learn commercial skills by developing hypothetical business plans; and for the first time, scientists from India are preparing to participate.

BBSRC Innovation Programme Manager and past Biotechnology YES competitor, Dr Simon Cutler takes a look at how this Competition goes from strength to strength – and how in one case it directly spawned a REAL business idea.



Last month, the University of Manchester Incubator Company (UMIC) announced that it had secured funding for a North West Development Agency Biotechnology Young Entrepreneur Scheme (YES) Competition in October and that the winners will go forward to the national Biotechnology YES final in London in December.

That UMIC has done this in partnership with the RDA and AstraZeneca, both of which are helping to fund the Manchester event, is a wonderful example of how the Competition is growing at the grass roots level, and bringing in more and more postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers across the UK. This year we expect to see the highest number of participants yet in the Competition's 12-year history. The North West venture follows Yorkshire Forward's establishment of a regional competition, Bioscience YES, which also feeds into the national final.

It is also exciting that our success in attracting and building reciprocal competition arrangements with teams from North America is now being followed by a new partnership with India. The North American model, which was made possible by support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the British Council, is

providing the blueprint for the new partnership which is being sponsored and coordinated by the FCO and UKTI, and DBT India. Four teams from India will take part in regional events in the Autumn.

We know that participating in Biotechnology YES can be a turning point in scientists' careers, and there are several striking examples of where it provided the first step on the path to researchers' own companies or academic-industrial partnerships. Usually this is because the Competition provides a first taste of what knowledge transfer is about, in the 'safe' environment of hypothetical business planning, rather than 'for real'. However, the experience of one team from the University of Newcastle shows that the 'taking part' really can be what matters. As they described their hypothetical idea at one of the Competition workshops, it became clear that it had real commercial potential. If they had disclosed this publicly they would have forfeited any intellectual property (IP) rights. Instead, they were able to use the expertise provided by the Competition mentors and experts, coupled with advice from their local technology transfer office, to identify and patent their IP. The result is Osiris Biotechnology Ltd (see page 5).

The closing date for this year's Biotechnology YES competition is Monday **6 August**
www.biotechnologyyes.co.uk

Biotechnology YES is organised jointly by BBSRC and the University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation (UNIEI)



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