University of Birmingham awards £30,000 to enterprising academics

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Business showcase rewards for commercial innovations to improve rehab for brain injuries and develop the next generation of robots

Two researchers from the University of Birmingham have been awarded £15,000 at the inaugural Enterprising Birmingham – Business Plan Competition showcase to enable development of their research expertise into viable business opportunities.

Six finalists were chosen to present in front of a panel of expert 'Dragons', to battle it out for their share of the prize money. Hosted in the University of Birmingham's Business School, the showcase event on Thursday 13 January celebrated a wealth of business ideas emerging from research staff and doctoral researchers from across the University.

The event was launched by Sir Dominic Cadbury, Chancellor of the University, who said: "This event demonstrates the University of Birmingham's commitment, enthusiasm and support for taking research projects and ideas, which have practical opportunities, into the market."

He continued: "Universities are breeding grounds for ideas, with new people joining all of the time, and the fresh thinking, ethos and culture of a university all provide an excellent environment to develop these new ideas. New products and companies are the lifeblood of our economy and there couldn't be a better time to do this."

The winning projects were led by Dr Wai-Ling Bickerton and Dr Rustam Stolkin who were each awarded £15k to help further develop their research into a commercial product or service. Four runner-ups were awarded a prize of £1,000, presented by Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Edward Peck.

Winner of the best service based business idea was Dr Wai-Ling Bickerton in collaboration with Professor Glyn Humphreys working on a project called Cognition Matters. Their innovation provides a service to screen patients suffering from brain damage using the University of Birmingham's Cognitive Screen (BUCS), to identify at a much earlier stage the most appropriate rehabilitation strategy for patients.

Lead researcher, Dr Bickerton, research fellow from the School of Psychology commented: "I'm really excited to have won and I now need to make sure I deliver this idea as its potential has been recognised. Half the mission for this project is getting the message out there that there is a need for a service like this, so even if I didn't win the prize money, I would have still felt like a winner because of the opportunity to spread the message."

Dr Rustam Stolkin, a research fellow from the Department of Computer Science along with Professor Bob Stone and Dr Marek Kopicki won the product based category for their work on a new generation of tele-operated robots. Their business plan focuses on the development of a range of new technologies for a new generation of robots that will overcome current limitations including mobility, manipulation and ease of operation. This could provide benefits for both the defense and civil sectors.

Project lead, Dr Stolkin said: "I was very impressed by the standard and this opportunity is very valuable to me. As a post-doctoral researcher, funding like this is absolutely critical for me to develop my ideas and I think this competition demonstrates the forward thinking of the institution to open the competition up to people like me."

For further information, please **contact Catherine Mansell (mailto:c.mansell@bham.ac.uk)** .

Notes to Editors:

The Enterprising Birmingham – Business Plan Competition was sponsored by: Central Technology Belt; PricewaterhouseCoopers; Marks & Clerk LLP; Circles of Influence Campaign; the Knowledge Transfer Development Fund; Withers & Rogers LLP; and Birmingham Research Park.

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