

Budding space entrepreneurs wow industry experts

The 'Dragons' Den' style event, organised by the UK Space Agency and hosted yesterday, gave an opportunity for some of the UK's best and brightest minds to pitch their ideas to seven expert judges, offering them support like mentoring and the chance to build industry connections that they can use to take their plans to the next level.

All the participating students are aged between 11 and 22, with each being awarded a share of £50,000 in cash prizes for their ideas in the UK Space Agency's SatelLife Competition earlier this year.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

It is truly inspiring to see this country's next generation of entrepreneurs developing innovations that could help answer some of society's most challenging questions – including how we reduce air pollution or using satellite drones to deliver vital healthcare services.

I cannot wait to see what the future has in store for this year's young innovators and how they could bolster our thriving space industry.

The event was the next stage in developing their winning ideas, although the young people had a slightly different experience to those of previous years. An event usually hosted at the Harwell Space Cluster in Oxfordshire was instead swapped for the comfort of their own homes, with each contestant's families offering prep talks and cheering them on from off-camera.

Space is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the UK and could create an additional 30,000 career opportunities by 2030. Now in its fourth year, the SatelLife competition aims to encourage young people to think about how satellites impact our everyday lives and learn more about the careers available in the sector.

Emily Gravestock, Head of Applications at the UK Space Agency, said:

This is the fourth year we have run our SatelLife Competition and year-in, year-out I am amazed to see how these young innovators are able to apply space applications to tackle problems of everyday life.

We are proud to have been able to give these outstanding young people the opportunity to develop their out of this world ideas further. After the pitches we saw, I'm sure this won't be the last

we hear of these space entrepreneurs.

Ava Garside, a student from Leeds, was awarded the overall individual prize of £6,000 for her idea of a pin badge which monitors air pollution she said:

Meeting the dragons was an incredible experience! Their insights into the space industry were useful and to have feedback from them to help me solve problems and develop my application was amazing.

They've given me the confidence to recognise the commercial aspect of Perfect Sense and I'm looking forward to pitching to angel investors with their help.

It's been a real eye opener to hear from experts from so many different roles and to think that I could follow my own interests and consider a career in the space sector, as well as develop a commercial proposition.

The SatelLife competition is split into 3 age groups: 11 – 14; 15 – 18; 19 – 22. The other judges on the panel at the 'Dragons' Den' event were; Nick Appleyard from the European Space Agency, Rob Hill from Kx, Adina Gillespie from GHGSat, Michael Warner from Clci, Laurence Lai – Simmons & Simmons LLP, Chris Jones – Vor-TechX and Stuart Martin – Satellite Applications Catapult.

Previous SatelLife winners are currently paving their way in the sector. 2018 winners Christopher Law and Hammad Jeilani now own healthcare drone start-up Apian. Apian are developing a method to use satellite-enabled GPS to establish a network of secure air corridors to deliver COVID-19 samples, test-kits and PPE by drones.

Growing by over 60% since 2010, the UK space sector is an economic success story. The sector already supports £300 billion of UK economic activity through the use of satellite services.

The UK presents a huge opportunity for young people to take up careers in science, engineering or even as space entrepreneurs – helping to ensure the ongoing growth of the UK's space industry.

University students who are interested in developing their space engineering skills can enter OrbAstro's debut annual competition which launches this week. Teams are asked to build a spacecraft payload, integrate it with a satellite and win the chance to have it flown in space on their OrbAstro flat-sat.