Press paper for the British Science Festival 2009

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Lord Drayson inspires future scientists and engineers by revealing the one thing he wants invented

Celebrities and business urged to join the campaign for the sake of the UK's future prosperity

Today, the Minister for Science and Innovation, Lord Drayson, revealed the one thing that he wishes could be invented or discovered in the future, as he called on the UK's scientists and engineers of tomorrow to come forward today to enter themselves into the National Science and Engineering Competition.

The Minister also called on high profile figures from the worlds of science, entertainment and business to join together in pledging their support by putting forward their own "If only" ideas, to help highlight the endless possibilities of science and engineering. Budding young scientists and engineers who are already using science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) to make their "If only" ideas come true could win a share in over £50,000 of prizes through the Competition. They will also be invited to exhibit their projects at the UK's biggest celebration of science and engineering, The Big Bang: UK Young Scientists' and Engineers' Fair.

Lord Drayson explained: "Talented scientists and engineers are behind all of the greatest inventions and discoveries to date – much of which we now take for granted. Inspiring young people to become the UK's future scientists and engineers, is not only essential to the UK's future prosperity, but also to solving the wider issues that we as a society face; from climate change and disease, to caring for an ageing population through to strengthening our defence and security. It's therefore something that I believe everyone needs to get behind, regardless of their interests."

"In launching this campaign, I hope that we can capture the public's imagination and encourage young people to realise that they really could be the ones to make these "If only" dreams a reality."

Sir Roland Jackson, Chief Executive of the British Science Association, which leads the National Science and Engineering Competition commented: “Less than 100 years ago the World Wide Web, jet engines and understanding the structure of DNA, were mere fantasies, but combining creativity with technical ability, British scientists and engineers made them a reality. Making sure that young people have the skills to match their fantastic imaginations is vital to help them make what seems impossible now, possible in the future. Just think, not long ago televised pictures and mobile phones were just dreams. It’s now hard to imagine life without them”

Some young people are already achieving fantastic success using their skills to make their ideas happen. The National Science and Engineering Competition is an opportunity for 11-18 year-olds to put forward the projects they are proud of for the chance to win some of the £50,000 worth of prizes available. The Competition will culminate in an awards ceremony at The Big Bang, a three day educational experience and the UK’s biggest celebration of science and engineering under one roof, taking place in Manchester in March 2010. There, they will get the chance to compete for the title of the next UK Young Scientist of the Year and UK Young Engineer of the Year, and many remarkable accomplishments will be on display.

The 2009 Young Scientist of the Year, Peter Hatfield, said: “I’ve often thought about the vast possibilities that space offers and how we go about exploring it. That was one reason why I developed a cosmic ray detector. I can’t believe that simply by working on a project I was passionate about, I won the chance to visit the NASA Space Centres in Florida and Houston, a computer and £5,000!”

Chris Jefferies, Young Technologist of the Year, added: “My wish would be that humans could interact with computers by thought rather than traditional peripheral methods. Then from that, thoughts could be captured and analysed and reproduced.”

If you know someone who is already making their “If only” wishes a reality, encourage them to enter the National Science and Engineering Competition www.nationalsciencecompetition.org before 30th October to be in with a chance of winning. Alternatively if you can think of something that would make your life better, make your own “If only” wish at www.thebigbangfair.com/ifonly.

Ends

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Notes to editors

About The Big Bang

The Big Bang: UK Young Scientists' and Engineers' Fair at Manchester Central Convention Complex, 11-13 March 2010 will celebrate and raise the profile of young people's achievement in science and engineering and encourage more young people to take part in STEM initiatives with support from their parents and teachers. School groups will be invited to The Fair, which will take place over three days and include the 300 student projects showcasing innovation and creativity competing in the National Science & Engineering Competition for national and international awards. The Fair, which kicks off National Science and Engineering Week 2010, will also be open to the public on the Saturday.

The Competition entries, including British Science Association's CREST awards and projects supported by Young Engineers' form the centre piece of The Fair. The event, with an expected 13,000 visitors, is being organised by an extensive partnership from across the science, technology, engineering and mathematics communities, with support from the ETB (Engineering and Technology Board).

The Fair will represent the best the UK has to offer, with entries from students (both individuals and teams) aged 11 to 18. Projects chosen will cover all aspects of science, technology, engineering and maths (including computing) - and range from hands-on or practical, to research and test based.

Judging will start on day one of The Big Bang - with finalists shortlisted for judging again the next day. Day two will end with a glitzy and prestigious awards ceremony where winners of the National Science and Engineering Competition will be announced - the winners of the senior category will be crowned the UK Young Scientist and UK Young Engineer of the Year. For more information on The Big Bang visit www.thebigbangfair.co.uk.

About the National Science & Engineering Competition

The National Science & Engineering Competition is an initiative of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as a response to a recommendation in Lord Sainsbury's report 'The Race to the Top'. It is coordinated by the British Science Association in partnership with Young Engineers and The Big Bang. The Competition, open to all 11-18 year olds, accepts projects from all areas of science, technology, engineering and maths. The finals of the National Science and Engineering Competition will be held at The Big Bang. For more information and a full list of sponsors go to www.nationalsciencecompetition.org.

About CREST

CREST (Creativity in Science and Technology) is the nationwide curriculum enrichment award scheme for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), run by the British Science Association and established over 23 years ago. Through CREST, young people aged 11-19 explore the real nature of STEM by doing their own creative project work.

A key strength of the scheme is that it encourages projects with strong industry or academia links. For the student, the award itself is a tangible recognition of success, which can be included in their personal record of achievement and helps with applications to universities, colleges and potential employers. For more information visit; **www.britishscienceassociation.org/crest/**

About Young Engineers

Participation in Young Engineers stimulates interest, appreciation and engagement in the practical application of engineering and technology by young people in primary and secondary education. It enables volunteer teachers and their supporters to provide exciting, challenging and creative activities that enrich the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) curriculum.

Central to Young Engineers' operations is its growing nationwide network of after school engineering clubs, which form a core constituent of the Royal Academy of Engineering's Best Programme. The network is funded and supported entirely by industry and professional institutions and is endorsed by Government. Patron is HRH The Duke of York, KG, KCVO, ADC.

The Young Engineers website: www.youngeng.org provides a virtual community for teachers engaged in STEM education and offers them an invaluable resource, loaded with information and hands-on engineering activities designed both to inspire students' minds and develop their know-how.