Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

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# Inspirational £1.2m Think Physics project brings science to life at Northumbria

SCIENCE opens doors to the most incredible careers for young women.

This was the message being delivered at the official launch of Think Physics at Northumbria University. This pioneering project, created to inspire the next generation of female scientists and engineers, was brought to life at a launch filled with live experiments for all ages and world-class research on display at the University's city campus.

The three-year Think Physics initiative has been launched to help engage

more young people – especially girls and under-represented groups – in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) from pre-school to university and into their careers.

Led by Northumbria, in collaboration with a range of partners, the project is being funded by a £1.2 million grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Launched at the new Think Lab at Northumbria's city campus, the event involved an impressive display of scientific experiments and demonstrations for different age groups, with several of the activities directly reflecting research currently taking place at the University.

Think Physics was partly inspired by a report from the Institute of Physics, which revealed only 21 per cent of physics students at UK universities are female. The project aims to address this over the next three years under the leadership of Dr Carol Davenport, Director of Think Physics, and her team of specialists.

Dr Davenport said: "The Think Physics team and I feel incredibly excited and privileged to launch this innovative project and we look forward to making our vision a reality.

"In addressing the gender imbalance in STEM, we plan to follow the guidance of one of our partners, the Institute of Physics, which makes it clear that simply 'girlifying physics' is not the solution. It is about showing young people the applications, the real situations and the routes into a range of exciting careers. Our message to young people is that science opens doors.

"To make a success of the project we will be working in partnership, drawing on external expertise and resources, as well as engaging with the excellent research that is being carried out at Northumbria University. We also plan to take our work out to our partner schools and to bring visitors into our Think Lab on campus."

The project has two strands – i Think Physics, which will see the team working with young people in partner schools and Think Physics 4 all, focussing on the wider community including parents, teachers, employers, schools and communities. Partners include the Centre for Life, Institute of Physics, North Tyneside Learning Trust, Kielder Observatory and Solar Capture Technologies Ltd.

Vice-Chancellor of Northumbria University, Professor Andrew Wathey said: “I am delighted the University is leading this innovative and potentially future-shaping project. Over the next three years it will position the University and its partners as a beacon for STEM engagement and an inspiration to the next generation of scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians.

“Think Physics is ambitious and wide-ranging and will stand as an example of good practice for other institutions nationally and internationally. It is an important addition to our own academic portfolio, opening up a set of opportunities that will attract a diverse mix of students into STEM subjects.”

The launch was attended by key partners, businesses, parents and schools and also saw four winning schoolchildren from the North East presented with prizes after contributing to a Think Physics logo design competition. Newcastle Central MP Chi Onwurah, who has a degree in Electrical Engineering and worked in the telecoms industry, attended the event. She said: “The jobs, industries, economy, society and culture of the future will all increasingly be based on STEM subjects. We must make sure they are represented by boys and girls, men and women if we are to realise their full potential. The Think Physics project is an important contribution to this.”

Linda Conlon, Chief Executive of the Centre for Life, one of the project’s key partners, added: “This is an exciting time for physics in the region and we’re delighted to be working with Northumbria University to deliver this innovative project that will see young people – and especially girls, who are particularly under-represented in this field – involved in engaging physics-themed activities. Hopefully, this is just the start of a legacy that will ensure the North East remains a front runner in the engineering and technology fields.”

Northumbria offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in STEM disciplines across a number of its departments. To find out more click here. For more information about Think Physics go to: www.thinkphysics.org

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If you have a media enquiry please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk or call 0191 227 4571.

## Contacts

**Rik Kendall**
Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences
rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk
07923 382339

**Andrea Slowey**
Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences
andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk
07708 509436

**Rachael Barwick**
Press Contact
PR and Media Manager
rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk
07377422415

**James Fox**
Press Contact
Student Communications Manager
james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk

**Kelly Elliott**
Press Contact
PR and Media Officer
kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk

**Gemma Brown**
Press Contact
PR and Media Officer
gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk