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## **£1.2m grant to help young people to 'Think Physics'**

A pioneering project to get young people to 'Think Physics' from early years through to university has been awarded £1.2 million from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Led by Northumbria University, Newcastle, Think Physics is an innovative, cradle-to-career project aimed at using physics to inspire young people, particularly women, into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

The three-year project, supported by a number of high-profile partners and North East schools, will help establish Northumbria as a leader in STEM education, and comes after research by the Institute of Physics revealed only 21% of physics students at UK universities were female.

Think Physics looks to target this gender imbalance by changing the way young people, particularly girls and under-represented groups, engage with science from early years through to university and into their careers. The project will seek to address the national shortage of STEM skills in the UK by inspiring more young people to take up these disciplines at university.

There will be two key strands to the project: i-Think Physics, aimed at young people from early years to sixth form, and Think Physics 4All, which will focus on teachers, families, and the wider community.

Think Physics has received praise from Newcastle Central MP Chi Onwurah, an engineer herself, who has called for more to be done to inspire girls to get into STEM careers. She described the project as 'inspirational'.

Northumbria University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Ian Postlethwaite, said: "As a cradle-to-career project, Think Physics will inspire and engage young people from early years through to university and beyond, helping to produce the professional graduates and scientists of the future.

"This excellent project will expose young people to Northumbria's outstanding experience from a young age, helping to drive academic excellence from the earliest stages of the student journey.

"We're delighted to have secured this grant from the HEFCE Catalyst Fund to support Think Physics over three years. The successful bid is testament to the vision and hard work of all those involved."

The project will complement Northumbria's Physics and Physics with Astrophysics degrees, which are the only physics programmes available in Newcastle.

Professor Postlethwaite added: "Think Physics is an excellent example of Northumbria's commitment to partnership working and will see the University working with key partners such as the Centre for Life, Institute of

Physics, and Kielder Observatory as well as schools and colleges, employers and families.

“The project also supports the University’s Widening Participation (WP) policy in its bid to increase the uptake of physics and wider STEM disciplines by women and under-represented groups.”

Newcastle Central MP Chi Onwurah said: “The lack of girls and women studying physics blights both our society and our economy. The Think Physics initiative uses a wide range of local talent and experience to inspire girls with the power of physics and help retain them in STEM careers. We need more such inspiration.”

Think Physics will feature a physical hub at the University and a digital presence, which will employ the latest technology. It will also be supported by a network of national and regional partners and outreach work at North East schools and colleges.

The project’s key partners, such as the Institute of Physics, Centre for Life, and North Tyneside Learning Trust, and Kielder Observatory, joined Northumbria in celebrating the news of the successful bid.

Dr Alex Brabbs, Institute of Physics’ Regional Officer for the North East, said: “We are very pleased to hear that Think Physics has received funding from HEFCE. This project will allow us to build on our existing relationship with Northumbria University and other key partners in the North East region.

“We look forward to working in partnership to integrate this project with some of the lessons we have learned in our work to create an on-going legacy for physics in the North East.”

Linda Conlon, Chief Executive of the Centre for Life, said: “Physics is an important foundation for many careers, particularly in engineering and technology, which are two areas that the North East excels in.

“However, there is a big skills shortage in this field and, disappointingly, there are not many girls taking up the subject. We’re thrilled, therefore, to work with Northumbria University on such an ambitious project to get more girls to think about doing physics at school and university. I’m confident that

our programme of fantastic hands-on activities will play a key part in this process.”

North Tyneside Learning Trust Chief Executive, Kehri Ellis, said: “North Tyneside Learning Trust is delighted to be working with Northumbria University on this incredibly exciting project.

“The cradle-to-career approach being adopted through Think Physics is particularly valuable as it will help us keep children and young people excited and involved in physics as they journey through their education. I’m thrilled that HEFCE have prioritised this project for funding.”

Think Physics will also work closely with a number of employers from the region. One of these will be Solar Capture Technologies Ltd.

Dr Dominique Morrison, Head of Research at the company, said: “As a UK manufacturer of solar PV cells and modules, we employ a variety of scientists and technicians and have a high proportion of female staff.

“We recognise the importance of encouraging young women to consider scientific careers in our sector. We are keen to share some of the real life applications of physics and demonstrate that science is interesting, fun, rewarding, and accessible.

“We are delighted that the Think Physics bid has been successful and we are looking forward to inspiring young women to get involved.”

Think Physics is a three-year project in the first instance with a long-term vision of creating an ongoing partnership to support young people into physics, science and engineering, while providing a blueprint of good practice, which can be extended nationally and internationally. The project is being led by Engineering and Environment at Northumbria University.

A number of new roles are being created to support Think Physics.

For information about these vacancies go to: <http://work4.northumbria.ac.uk/vacancies/>

For more information about Think Physics go to:

[www.northumbria.ac.uk/thinkphysics](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/thinkphysics)

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## Contacts



### **Rik Kendall**

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

[rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto: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](mailto:andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk)

07708 509436



### **Rachael Barwick**

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

[rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk)

07377422415





**James Fox**

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

[james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk)



**Kelly Elliott**

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

[kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk)



**Gemma Brown**

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

[gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk)