

FEATURE — 3

Local boys represent the UK in Moon challenge

Two local boys have reached the final stage of an international competition to send their experiment to the Moon. Sam Brass, a former pupil at Sonning CofE Primary School and of the Piggott Secondary School and Nick Doughty, also a former Piggott school pupil, are now students at the University of Bath, as is the third member of their team, Elliot Robinson.

The three aerospace engineering students entered a global competition last September to design an experiment that will help humans populate other planets.

The competition, 'Lab2Moon' is run by Team Indus, a space technology company in India and are the front runners in the Google Lunar XPRIZE competition attempting to be the first privately funded company to send a robotic spacecraft to the moon.

Over 3,000 teams entered the Lab2Moon challenge and in November Sam, Nick and Elliot were shortlisted as one of the 25 teams to reach the finals. They are the only remaining team in the competition representing the UK.

The three students are now building a working prototype of their experiment to be presented to a panel of experts in Bangalore, India in March.

Their experiment, named 'LunaDome' is a device which inflates a small dome to atmospheric pressure and maintains it. Since there is no atmosphere on the moon, they hope to understand the requirements for containing an atmosphere and how to scale this inflatable dome up to be habitable by humans.

A large element of their remit for this stage of the competition is to promote their project through social media, in the hope of inspiring some of the younger generation to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects so they are looking for as much exposure as possible. 50% of their score in the latter stages of the competition is based on the success of their social media campaign.



Reaching for the Moon: (left to right) Elliot Robinson, Sam Brass and Nick Doughty

The team has recently been interviewed live on BBC Radio Berkshire and BBC Radio Bristol and have been invited by both to return for another interview towards the end of this month when they will know if they have reached the milestones necessary to be flown to Bangalore in March.

They are currently joint first on the leader board of preparedness being monitored on a weekly basis by Team Indus.

This month, two of them will visit their old primary and secondary schools - Sonning CofE Primary and The Piggott - to showcase their experiment and hope to enthuse and inspire some young people to develop the same passion for STEM subjects that has brought them to where they are. They regularly post updates on their progress on their website, Facebook and Twitter.

The winner of the competition will build a flight model of their experiment which will be sent to the moon on board the Team Indus spacecraft lifting off in December this year.

Such is the confidence that the University of Bath has in their project that they have awarded them £2,000 with which to purchase the necessary components to construct their prototype. The team has set up a blog on the university's website

and will post progress updates there monthly.

Sam Brass and Nick Doughty are third year students in their year in industry working at Honeywell Aerospace in Yeovil, and Elliot Robinson is in his first year at Bath. They all work tirelessly on their project during the evenings and weekends.

You can help the boys with the social media side of their project by following their progress and sharing their Facebook and Twitter posts (see below). They would also be delighted to discuss their experiment with anyone who would like to know more about it.



Team LunaDome

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