

## Russian billionaire sponsors astronomical project linking schools in London and Moscow

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25th July 2016 at 16:05

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### Pupils will get the chance to discover stars and asteroids and have them officially recorded

Schools in London and Moscow will forge links to share their astronomical findings thanks to a new initiative launched by Russia's richest woman.

Yelena Baturina, a billionaire who made her fortune in the construction industry, has launched a programme to establish partnerships between schools in the capital cities in a bid to boost interest in astronomy.

The project, called *Discovery Within a Week*, will bring PhD students from University College London's physics and astronomy department to mentor secondary pupils in schools in disadvantaged areas of the city.

The astronomers will teach young people about the technology used in astronomy, and each week the students will share their research via Skype with their counterparts in Moscow.

Any stars discovered by participating students will be recorded in the International Variable Star Index, while the coordinates of the asteroids detected will be sent to the Minor Planet Center at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory at Harvard University.

A number of schools have already signed up to a pilot of the project, and it is hoped more schools will join the programme at the start of the academic year.

The project comes in the year that British astronaut Tim Peake inspired a generation of children with his six month stay on the International Space Station.

### Cutting-edge science in the classroom

The initiative is being funded by Ms Baturina's philanthropic foundation Noosphere in partnership with the Mayor's Fund for London.

Matthew Patten, chief executive of the Mayor's Fund for London, said: "This is a fantastic new collaboration between East and West, bringing cutting-edge science and astronomy into London classrooms and broadening children's perceptions of the world they live in. We want more schools in London to join this journey of discovery."

It is hoped the partnerships with the schools will create a wide network of young stargazers and researchers.

Ms Baturina said the aim of her foundation was to encourage younger generations to think globally and with an informed, open and universal perspective.

"That, I am sure, will keep our society from sliding into the chaos of differences and conflicts. We should show both children and adults the universal aesthetic and scientific principles that unite people from all parts of the world," she added.

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