SAINTS programme brings powerful space data to Earth

Thursday 22 November, 2018

INNOVATIVE businesses in the North East are at the forefront of a programme launched today to connect insightful data gathered from satellites and Earth-based sensors and use it to solve major problems facing businesses, governments and communities.

SAINTS – **Situational Awareness Information National Technology Service** – will bring together experts from business, universities and the public sector who will use artificial intelligence to combine travel, business and satellite data to come up with solutions to some of the country's most pressing challenges – from traffic congestion to UK border security issues.

It's been launched by the North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence, operated by Business Durham, the economic development organisation for County Durham, with the support of the Satellite Applications Catapult and the UK Space Agency. The programme is supported by the presence of a strong advanced manufacturing supply chain and global centres of academic and industry excellence in areas such as advanced instrumentation for space, sensors, printable electronics, graphene applications, photonics, smart data, GPS, artificial intelligence and immersive technology.

SAINTS intends to focus on problems that have an impact on the daily lives of people and seek to solve problems that they struggle with in everyday life. Together, the organisations will offer: innovation and incubation support to turn opportunities into commercial markets for new technologies and applications; skills development and outreach; and inspiration to attract partners and investment from government, business and academia.

SAINTS believes that situational awareness enables organisations to have the power to respond quickly, such as deploying emergency services to the right critical places during major incidents or following patterns of behaviour that might predict threats, like a terror attack.

Austen Atkinson, CEO of Lexicon Group, based in Seaham, an innovative, fast-paced technology agency combining Artificial Intelligence, Augmented and Virtual Reality and nanomaterials, stated: "The scope for the data harnessed from satellites is huge. We live in a massive data world but there's no one really processing all this data for the UK, pulling it together, and using it to help us all. SAINTS will be our 'data-glue', holding high technologies together.

"There is amazing work going on in the North East. We're delighted to be one of the innovative companies on board for the take-off of SAINTS, which will push the frontiers of technology."

Other companies involved include Durham-based Intelligence Fusion, which helps security companies and global businesses manage risk; Northumberland-based NORSS, which plays an important role in tracking and monitoring satellites; and 3DEO, which combines Earth observation, big data and 3D interactive visualisation to provide solutions to a wide range of industries.

Stuart Martin, CEO of the Satellite Applications Catapult, said: "We have only just scratched the surface of the information satellites can provide, especially when they are combined with new technologies like AI.

"I'm excited to see SAINTS accelerate the development of the next generation of situational awareness technology and its applications to help solve real-world problems. This programme will benefit the economy locally and nationally, and increase the attractiveness of the UK as a hub for new commercial space services."

Catherine Johns, innovation director at Business Durham, which manages the North East Centre of Excellence, said: "The democratisation of data 'from space' and 'of space' is a game-changer for further space and Earth operations. SAINTS will act as a rallying point to work together and capitalise on the tremendous capabilities that we have across the North East and the UK as a whole to provide solutions to the entrenched societal challenges around health, transport and social mobility that business as usual will not fix."

Dr Graham Turnock, chief executive of the UK Space Agency, said: "The launch of SAINTS is a welcome development for the UK space industry and a signal of the ambition of the North East's fast-growing space sector. The UK Space Agency funds business incubators in more than 20 locations to support start-ups across the country, and it is great to see new programmes that can help the UK thrive

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