

From the Galactic Challenge to the UKSDC - My Story by Eva Fishman



As I entered Imperial College's main doors into a crowded atrium to compete in my first UKSDC, thoughts of worry flashed through my head like a mental Camera roll. Whilst I could hear the voices of nervous chatter there was still an intangible feeling of excitement and anticipation in the air. There were at least 300 people in here making it at least five times bigger, if not more, than the Galactic Challenge (the competition for younger students in Y5 to Y9.)

Let me back up a bit. Before finding myself here, nearly 2 years ago I competed in my very first Galactic Challenge, with the same feelings of nervousness and underlying excitement, I stepped into an atrium of about 50 people. As soon as everyone took a seat in the lecture hall the director of the Competition gave us all an introduction. As I looked around, boys and girls were all hastily taking notes just as I was. I could see many different schools sitting together in teams. My school group only consisted of four people, so by the time we were allocated into teams of 12, we were placed with another group. Within our team we chose designated roles.

I became the head of the Structural sub-team. This is one of many roles such as: President, Marketing, Human Factors, Operations and Automations. Throughout the day my role consisted of designing the overall space vessel, interior, materials etc. I didn't find myself as stressed as I thought I would have been since we had a great team and helpful advisors available. Whilst there were some initial rocky moments integrating with new teammates, it turned into an area of strength as communication within the team became very good (which is good preparation for the UKSDC when most of the team is mixed with people you don't know.) Since many aspects of designing a space colony overlap, it is important for everyone, no matter what aspect they're working on, to communicate with each other.

After a full day of work, along with lively banter but mostly dedicated focus, came the time to present our space colony to the judges. We were all anxious to win. Listening to the other teams' presentations is an interesting experience, judging and thinking of what we may be missing in our slides. Then, came the anxious wait for results. Finally, the judges returned. This was the first time I had experienced the playful torture of the Galactic Challenge tradition of selecting the winner, and unfortunately it doesn't change once you get to the older competition. As the ellipse landed on our team's name, a Burst of screams came from around me and I too began screaming with joy.

Whilst winning felt good, there were many valuable new experiences to take away with me in life and to my second Galactic Challenge. This started off the same way, except this time I was less nervous with more classmates. Our team was still not big enough, so we were mixed with others. The main difference this time was my new role as president. It is unlike the other roles in the sense that it has more responsibilities, and everyone is reliant on you. It was more demanding than I expected. Throughout the course of the day the team worked very hard. After preparing our proposal and presenting it, winning was the last thing on my mind.

As the final ellipse stopped on our name, I was in disbelief as my whole team cheered around me.

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STUDENT STORIES

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Now returning to this year, Y10 for me, I was no longer eligible for the Galactic Challenge. I was eager to participate in the UKSDC. Back again in the crowded atrium - at first it felt very similar to the Galactic Challenge only scaled up with the introductory presentation more detailed and longer. The Teams were much bigger, consisting of 50+ people. All the sub roles were similar. I went for the structural role again but this time I wasn't the head. The main difference between doing the same role for the Galactic Challenge versus the UKSDC, was the amount of detail required. One person doesn't have such a broad role and focuses on one specific aspect. This didn't mean there was less work (in fact more) it meant each person focused on one aspect of the design, going into greater detail. After a long day designing our space colony, all teams gathered back in the lecture hall to make their proposals to the judges. Somehow none of us were too disappointed that we hadn't won. It had been a fun day.

Upon reflection the jump between the Galactic Challenge to the UKSDC is not a big one, and it felt like the perfect age to transition to the older group. However, participating in the Galactic Challenge gives you even more experience for the main competition, as it introduces you to the ideas of team communication, research skills, preparing a proposal and presentation to judges, at a smaller scale to the main UKSDC competition, so by the time you've stepped up, it is all the less intimidating. The competitions are very well managed by the UKSDC organisers, and there is always helpful, friendly advice at hand from experienced volunteers who have competed in earlier years, some of whom participated in the global finals at NASA. Inspirational, since I'd like to go one day. So, whether you start doing the competition from year 5 or from year 13, it is a very enjoyable experience where you can meet new people and take away valuable life skills.



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