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Proxima mission Thomas Pesquet to perform experiments conceived by young scientists under supervision of CNES's Youth Education department

As part of Thomas Pesquet's Proxima mission on the International Space Station (ISS) scheduled from November 2016 to May 2017, CNES's Youth Education department has issued a call for proposals to university and high-school students for innovative educational experiments to be tested out in microgravity conditions.

The students' experiments will be accompanied by six French technology experiments coordinated by CNES's CADMOS centre for the development of microgravity applications and space operations, focusing chiefly on life sciences, scientific research and medical monitoring of astronauts.

From the many responses to its call for proposals, CNES has selected experiments on the effect of weightlessness on seed growth from the Lycée International Charles de Gaulle in Dijon, the Lycée Léon Blum in Le Creusot and the Lycée Pierre Paul Riquet in Saint-Orens; on crystal growth from the Lycée de Gujan-Mestras; and on protein digestion by enzymes from the Lycée Lachenal in Annecy.

Some 100 high-school pupils and their teachers recently presented their projects to experts from CNES and ESA at a detailed design review at the Toulouse Space Centre. This review enabled CNES to help teams adapt their concepts to the special constraints of the ISS, for example in terms of size, mass, safety and operations.

"The young students' presentations showed their motivation and commitment to this exciting project," commented Stéphane Fredon, ISS Youth Experiments Project Manager. The experiments are to be delivered to CNES in March 2016 for validation before being transferred to ESA and then NASA. On the ISS, Thomas Pesquet will apply detailed procedures established for the experiments by CNES and ESA experts. Students will be able to reproduce the experiments on the ground and compare their results to those obtained in microgravity conditions.

This project ties in with CNES's mission to inform and educate, in particular to get youngsters interested in science subjects and careers. To this end, the agency's Youth Education department proposes a broad range of projects covering its domains of activity that 10-to-25-year-olds can pursue in school hours or during their leisure time, supported by local associations. Every year, 100,000 youngsters take part in CNES educational activities and 1,000 teachers receive special training.

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