

University's Inspire Launch Grow awards 2019 – winners announced

The University of Edinburgh held their innovation awards ceremony last night. Award winners included inventions such as human-like skin for robots, personalised synthetic voices for people who lose theirs through illness, and environmentally friendly sanitary products.

Inspire Launch Grow, the annual competition for entrepreneurial staff, students and recent graduates, was hosted by Edinburgh Innovations, the University's commercialisation service, in the Playfair Library, Old College.

Awards of up to £5,000 were presented across five categories, judged by established entrepreneurs and business advisers. Finalists had previously pitched their businesses and social enterprises to the judges.

Engineering PhD student Zakareya Hussein and Product Design masters student Laura Garcia Caberol won the Emerging Innovation Award for Students for their company Touchlab.

They are developing an electronic skin that can be wrapped around any robot to give it a human-like sense of touch, including 'pain' when poked with sharp objects.

Taking the Emerging Innovation Award for Staff were research assistants Alice Smith from Edinburgh Medical School and Lovisa Wihlborg from the School of Informatics, for Speak:Unique.

Their technology creates personalised synthetic replica voices for people with conditions such as motor neurone disease who

lose the ability to speak.

Using a recording of just 30 minutes of a patient talking, the system is able to turn any text into speech in the person's own voice, enabling them to have an authentic-sounding voice long after they lose the ability to vocalise themselves.

"It's great to see your hard work come together, and to see the other activity going on in the University startup and spinout scene," said Smith. "We're at an exciting moment where we're ready to launch as a spinout company and reach people we couldn't reach as a research project. It's been fantastic to have Edinburgh Innovations' support to help us navigate the path to commercialisation."

The winner of the Social and Environment Award was Alison Wood, a recent graduate of the School of Economics and founder of Lily pads. Her social enterprise began its work in Kenya, addressing a lack of affordable sanitary products that prevents girls from attending school, and has now introduced an environmentally friendly sanitary product to the UK market.

Dr George Baxter, CEO of Edinburgh Innovations, said: "The finalists have come up with some amazing ideas and shown the necessary enterprising spirit and energy to take them forward as solid business propositions. It's always an honour to support our staff and student entrepreneurs."

The Enterprise Award went to postdoctoral researcher Dr Alireza Abbassi Monjezi, founder of Waterwhelm, a technology that turns wastewater into clean water while simultaneously producing renewable electricity and fertilizer.



Winners are announced at the Inspire Launch Grow Awards 2019. The awards are an annual showcase event to celebrate enterprise at the University of Edinburgh. Photo MAVERICK PHOTO AGENCY

Finally, Dr Luca Cassetta, Research Fellow in the MRC Centre for Reproductive Health, took the Innovation Cup for his company Macomics, which is developing antibody-based cancer therapeutics.

The awards ceremony was attended by more than 100 guests from the across the University and Edinburgh's entrepreneurial ecosystem, including members of the investment community who regularly support startups and spinouts launched by students and staff.

All of the winners in Inspire Launch Grow 2019 are clients of Edinburgh Innovations, which provides a range of free services to students, staff and recent graduates to commercialise their ideas or research discoveries, including enterprise services such as business advice and company formation.



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