

Converge has a virtual future lined up for the semi finals

The academic community shows its spirit as a new 2020 Converge cohort is announced.

Converge is the country's company creation programme for the Higher Education sector. This year it celebrates its ten year anniversary.

The community has rallied to create a range of transformational business ideas despite the global pandemic. A record number of applications to the programme were submitted with core project ideas in technology, life sciences and renewable energy, but also some innovation around Covid-19 itself.

There are 60 semi-final entries in three categories – Converge, Creative and Impact and later this month these entrants will move onto the next stage of intensive business and pitch training.

Dr Claudia Cavalluzzo, director of Converge comments; “Six months ago, no one knew that we would be in the midst of a pandemic that would have such a profound impact on all our lives. With university campuses closed, engaging with normal university life, let alone preparing an entry to Converge 2020, was challenging.

In the context of such a massive and unparalleled backdrop, imagine our delight that entries this year are at record levels. Staff, students and researchers across our Higher

Education Institutions have again demonstrated that, even in the face of upheaval, they continue to strive to unlock their potential to transform lives and improve society.”

On the Covid-19 theme, a Converge Challenge submission, Loch Electronics, a business created by University of Strathclyde post-graduate student Franciso Carreno, has designed plans for a dishwasher that uses medical grade UV-C light to fully disinfect PPE facemasks in hospitals, which helps to address supply shortage issues.

Amongst the 30 entries within the Converge Challenge is Vennle, a University of Edinburgh start-up, which aims to commercialise an AI-powered Big Data analytics system to forecast and optimise transport networks – starting with bike-sharing to accelerate smart cities and infrastructure. Vennle has partnered with the UK’s largest bike-sharing operator to demonstrate its novel Machine Learning model for bicycle redistribution.

This year’s Creative Challenge, which highlights innovation that demonstrate originality and creativity, provides 15 projects with a focus on new ways of helping to future-proof the arts, music and tourism in Scotland.

The ‘We Make Music Work’ music business from Queen Margaret University will establish opportunities to empower musicians to generate income using immersive Virtual Reality tools, whilst Cinedoche Screen Collective, from the University of St Andrews, develops and produces short features and documentaries for platforms such as Netflix, Amazon-Prime, and YouTube.

On Tuesday 30 June there will be an opportunity for semi-finalists to take part in Inside Innovation, a new virtual pitching event ahead of the final on 24 September 2020. Claudia continued: “Each semi-finalist will have just 60 seconds to capture the attention of our investor-led panel of

judges with a Best Pitch and Audience Choice prize up for grabs. Another highlight of the evening will be the interview with serial tech entrepreneur, Lesley Eccles, co-Founder of fantasy sports platform, FanDuel, who recently launched Relish which promises to be the world's first relationship training app.

Despite the restrictions of not all being in the one venue, we are making the most of this new way of engaging with the world where everybody, despite social distancing, has gotten a little closer.”



Dr Claudia Cavalluzzo