

Converge finalists show off the best academic innovation

2020 CONVERGE FINALISTS WILL SHOWCASE THE VERY BEST ACADEMIC INNOVATION TO THE WORLD

The finalists for Converge 2020, Scotland's leading academic company creation programme, have been announced.

Eighteen fledgling businesses and a wide range of exceptional innovation from across the nation's universities are preparing to be showcased later this month.

As with many other high-profile national events, this year's Converge final on Thursday 24 September 2020 will be staged 'virtually' via a webcast, nonetheless it will present a unique opportunity to shine the light on the very best of Scottish academic entrepreneurship to the world. Indeed, this year's Converge final has already sparked a surge of interest from academic and business communities across the continents.

It gives the finalists across three of the four established Converge 'Challenges' – Impact, Creative and the flagship Converge category, extra impetus to make an impression as they each vie for a chance to win part of the £230,000 total prize fund of equity free cash and in-kind business support.

No Higher Education Institute has been untouched by the Covid-19 pandemic with university campuses forced into lockdown almost immediately, making this year's cohort all the more resilient in building their business propositions.

Technology and data driven innovation remain over-arching themes in the main Converge Challenge this year. These include

the analysis of satellite data, assessing fish health across Scotland's salmon farming sector and diagnostic techniques to identify heart diseases in companion animals using a single blood sample.

An interactive mobile gaming platform that educates and informs users on foraging, cooking and crafting; breathing fresh life into knitting using digital knitting patterns and a novel blowpipe engineered to reduce pipers' risk of lung disease, are some of the entries hoping to emerge as winners of the Creative Challenge.

Meanwhile, the Impact Challenge, aimed at developing businesses that focus on social or environmental issues, is well represented with propositions that span from microgrid technology that will transform off-grid electrification in the developing world to innovative farming approaches to turn degraded farmland into a healthy wetlands ecosystem where food can then be grown.

In spite of the pandemic, applications to Scotland's premier academic company creation programme have been exceptional high this year with a record number of initial submissions up 17% on 2019.

In June, 60 semi-finalists presented their ideas via two virtual pitch events that reached a global audience, where more than 300 people logged in from the likes of the US and India.

To add to the global dimension, this year's Converge final is hosted directly from Doha, Qatar by Scottish news presenter Halla Mohieddeen.

She will welcome guest speakers including Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, multi-award-winning environmental entrepreneur, Kresse Wesling MBE, co-founder of sustainable British fashion brand, Elvis & Kresse, Professor Andrea Nolan OBE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Edinburgh Napier

University..

Susan Fouquier, Managing Director, Business Banking, Royal Bank of Scotland will also announce the winner of the 'Rose Award', a brand-new award presented to an aspiring, ambitious female entrepreneur from this year's Converge cohort, named after Alison Rose, CEO, The Royal Bank of Scotland.

Venture capitalist and serial investor, Paul Atkinson, founder of Par Equity and Chair of the Converge Strategic Advisory Board, believes that, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the high calibre of entries this year is testament to Scotland's Higher Education Institutions' continued support of innovative projects and ideas.

"This year has unquestionably been a challenge for us all. Despite university campuses being in lockdown, the making of an entrepreneur lies in the unerring ability to overcome any obstacle and push on for success.

That's what we are seeing with this year's exceptional final cohort and is what sets Converge apart as Scotland's most prestigious company creation programme for our academic community."

This year, the 10th anniversary of Converge, will have all attendees including university principals, senior academic staff, entrepreneurs, investors, Converge funders and partners, and the media, logging in from the comfort of their own homes to 'attend' this year's event. As Claudia Cavalluzzo, Director of Converge, notes, the unusual circumstances this year, presents an opportunity for Scotland's academic community to throw open its arms to the rest of the world.

She commented: "For obvious reasons, our approach this year is different and wholeheartedly embraces the message that Scotland is an innovation powerhouse. The beauty of the

virtual format is we can expect people joining us from across the globe.

The last global economic downturn over a decade ago happened to coincide with the launch of some of the most successful start-ups like WhatsApp, Groupon and Uber, so we should take inspiration from that.”

The 2020 finalists will present their propositions to the judging panels made of investors and industry experts, who will then choose the 2020 winners.



Claudia Cavalluzzo, Director of Converge