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Converge Awards Marks First Clean Sweep for Female Entrepreneurs

Ross Kelly

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Held last week, the Converge 2020 virtual awards saw female entrepreneurs sweep the board for the first time.

Female entrepreneurs have emerged as winners in the three main ‘Challenge’ categories at the 2020 Converge Awards.

This year’s Converge final was hosted from Doha, Qatar by Scottish news presenter Halla Mohieddeen. She welcomed a number of guest speakers, including a keynote address by Scotland’s First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

The First Minister was joined by award-winning environmental entrepreneur, Kresse Wesling MBE and Professor Andrea Nolan OBE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Edinburgh Napier University.



Speaking at the awards, Sturgeon praised the Converge cohort as having the “qualities and the mindset that the Scottish Government will continue to encourage and support”.

In her keynote, she highlighted 18 emerging businesses who reached this year’s Converge finals. Businesses from a wide range of sectors reached this year’s final, underlining the growing strength of Scotland’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

“It is highly commendable that Converge alumni have established around 200 new companies since it started in 2010, adding more than £20 million to Scotland’s economy last year alone. Together they have helped to create more than 500 jobs in a range of key sectors,” she said.

“We know that innovation is vital to our economic future to help us meet some of the great challenges of our time. We want Scotland to be at the forefront of meeting these kinds of global challenges by designing and

inventing the advances which will shape all of our futures,” Sturgeon added.

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Earth Blox, a University of Edinburgh startup led by Dr Genevieve Patenaude – a Senior Lecturer from the School of Geosciences – won the flagship Converge Challenge Award.

The startup aims to remove barriers that prevent the widespread adoption of global satellite data and intelligence and to provide a better understanding of the global impact and concerns around deforestation, urban expansion and largescale disaster mapping.

Meanwhile, the Impact Challenge was won by Leia Kennedy of Aquaponics Garden from the Fife-based Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC).

Kennedy co-founded Aquaponics Garden to offer a scalable, sustainable and profitable indoor farming model that overcomes seasonality. By developing self-sustaining technology to grow crops in urban areas that convert fish waste into nutrients for plants, Aquaponics Garden hopes to reduce the impact of food production on the environment.

Elena Höge, a Design and Digital Media Masters graduate from the University of Edinburgh, secured the top prize for the Creative Challenge with her newly-founded startup, Yaldi Games.

Yaldi Games offers an interactive and educational nature experience games production company.

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Converge Challenge winner, Dr Genevieve Patenaude, will receive £71,000 in equity-free cash and in-kind business support. Genevieve highlighted the importance of timely information in mitigating natural disasters and believes that Earth Blox can offer fundamental improvements to tackling and preventing the damage caused by climate change.

She said: “Winning the Converge Challenge will allow us to fast track our vision of democratising planetary-scale satellite intelligence, so it becomes accessible to a whole suite of organisations dealing with humanitarian and disaster relief. Converge has been a wonderful journey for us and winning on this milestone tenth anniversary is something I shall always cherish.”

The inaugural ‘Rose Award’, presented to an aspiring, ambitious female entrepreneur from this year’s Converge cohort, was won by Leia Kennedy of Aquaponics Garden from SRUC making her a double winner on the night. Kennedy’s prize will include a one-to-one mentoring session with Alison Rose, Chief Executive of NatWest Group.

Claudia Cavalluzzo, Director of Converge, commented: “The standard of entries continues to reach new heights. Unquestionably, the growth of Converge is proof positive that the entrepreneurial mindset is alive and well across our university sector.

“Of course, 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 regardless.”

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