

Press release 25 November 2021

Alex Cloherty representing the Netherlands wins FameLab International Final 2021



Watch the FameLab International Final on YouTube

Alex Cloherty representing the Netherlands was today crowned Champion at the FameLab International 2021 Online Final (25 November). Alex successfully competed against 22 other researchers and young STEM professionals from across the globe to win the title of the world's best science communicator. She referenced popular Netflix show *The Queen's Gambit* to illustrate how our immune system fights viruses like Dengue, HIV and SARS.

The Final, presented by Greg Foot, was streamed on the FameLab YouTube channel to a global audience of thousands, united by a love of science and an appetite for the very latest scientific research served up in the most engaging and entertaining way. The short talks spanned a range of pressing global societal issues including health, wellbeing and climate change.

The task of deciding who would win the crown fell to three judges: sustainability specialist Tara Shine, maths broadcaster Rogério Ferreira Martins and journalist Julia Wheeler.

They chose Alex Cloherty – a PhD researcher in autophagy at the Amsterdam UMC, Netherlands – as the contestant who best demonstrated FameLab's three Cs – Content, Clarity and Charisma. Rogerio said “*Alex demonstrated a real passion for her subject, attracting attention from the outset with magnificent use of props. She explained viral interaction with great clarity and charisma. The world needs brilliant science communicators more than ever before, and Alex is a worthy winner.*”

Alex said “*Science communication is something I love to do, and my presentation brought together three of my favourite things: Netflix, chess and the immune system! In a year like this, it has been easy to feel isolated. Taking part in FameLab and meeting a group of such amazing people with a passion for what they do has been a real joy.*”



The two runners up were **Letago Kgomoewana** from South Africa and **Samantha Nixon** from Australia. Letago is a masters student in climatology at North-West University, South Africa and explained how local knowledge can lead to climate resilience. Samantha is a post-doctoral researcher in biomedical science at The University of Queensland, Australia. Her talk was based on her research into how compounds in spider venom can be used to develop new drugs to combat parasitic diseases.

The Audience Prize was awarded to Sirawit Ittisoponpisan from Thailand, who is a bioinformatics lecturer at the Prince of Songkla University. Sirawit spoke on the power of prediction amid the pandemic. He said "*I joined FameLab to improve my science communication without much thought of winning. To come so far and win the audience vote has been just phenomenal.*"

2021 marks the 15th and final year of the FameLab International competition created by Cheltenham Festivals and delivered globally in partnership with the British Council, involving over 40,000 participants and more than 200 partner organisations giving support to FameLab in over 40 countries.

Adrian Fenton, Senior Consultant and programme lead for FameLab International at the British Council said: "*These winners represent the very best talent from a global programme – reaching and inspiring millions around the world with its creative bridge between science and culture. While it's an emotional end of an era as the 15-year partnership with the British Council draws to a close, the spirit of FameLab International will continue to flourish in the very capable hands of Cheltenham Festivals.*"

Cheltenham Festivals will continue to operate FameLab in the UK and with several international partners. Director of Learning and Public Engagement Ali Mawle said: "*FameLab has a place in the hearts of thousands of people across the world and we want to thank the British Council for an incredibly fruitful partnership over 15 years. Cheltenham Festivals is looking forward to continuing the legacy of FameLab, creating an active international community of science-related researchers who are confident and skilled in communicating their research with the public. We will continue to support the next generation of science communicators by establishing an international network of trainers and institutions sharing resources, best practice and opportunities to support science communication.*"

Join in the conversation on Facebook and Twitter #FameLabInternational2021

More information for editors

FameLab was started in 2005 in the UK by Cheltenham Science Festival. The 15-year partnership with the British Council starting in 2007 has resulted in a vibrant global network of scientists and engineers engaging with international audiences.

This year's Finals featured contestants from 23 countries:

Australia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, Qatar, South Africa, Spain, Thailand and the UK. The video of the international final is available on the FameLab YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/famelab>

Biographies and photos of all 23 country finalists are available upon request.



Cheltenham Science Festival 7-12 June 2022 is for curious people of all ages and is an annual fixture for the UK's science community, who gather alongside journalists, artists and writers to share their latest ideas in thought-provoking and entertaining ways. It champions the next generation of STEM professionals and encourages everyone to engage confidently in conversations about science and how it affects their everyday lives. The Festival's Science for Schools year-round programme offers inspirational and interactive opportunities including science communication competition FameLab Academy.

Cheltenham Science Festival is part of Cheltenham Festivals, a charity creating experiences which bring joy, deepen curiosity, connect communities and inspire change.

www.cheltenhamfestivals.com/science

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. Last year we reached over 80 million people directly and 791 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive a 15 per cent core funding grant from the UK government.

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