

Northern Ireland's top five early-stage tech companies announced in Tech Nation's latest 'Rising Stars' competition

- Tech Nation announces the top five Northern Ireland Regional Winners of its fourth Rising Stars competition, recognising the UK's early-stage tech companies with the highest potential
- The 5 Northern Irish companies to be selected are Belfast-based [Overwatch Research](#), [CropSafe](#) and [Kairos](#), Lisburn-based [Kinva](#), and Antrim-based [Ecko](#), which span tech subsectors healthtech, sports tech, agritech and createch
- The tech sector in Northern Ireland is rapidly growing; the sector has received \$34.5mn in VC investment funding this year, as of November 2021 (a 49% increase on the \$23.1mn received in 2020), and has created 306% more jobs compared to the previous year (16,417 in H1 of 2021, up from 4041 in 2020)

2nd December 2021: Tech Nation has today announced the 5 Northern Ireland Regional Winners of its fourth Rising Stars competition, which recognises the brightest and best early-stage tech companies from every area of the UK. In total, 55 fast-growing tech scaleups from across the UK have been named this year's Regional Winners - 5 within each UK region. Previous years' Rising Stars Regional Winners have included [Selazar](#) (from Northern Ireland), [Circa5000](#) (from the North West) and [SeedLegals](#) (from London), who have received a combined £33.79mn in investment to date, demonstrating the ability of the Rising Stars Regional Winners to scale quickly, and their potential to become the UK's tech 'unicorns' (companies with valuations of \$1bn+) of the future.

These Regional Winners have been selected by a panel of over 50 judges (industry experts with extensive experience in starting and scaling tech businesses) based on their value proposition, competitive advantage, market traction, team experience and potential to scale.

This year's Northern Ireland Regional Winners are [Overwatch Research](#), [CropSafe](#), [Kairos](#), [Kinva](#) and [Ecko](#). These companies, 3 of which hail from Belfast - Northern Ireland's largest tech hub - and two of which are based in up-and-coming regions Lisburn and Antrim, are working to transform a range of different industries, including healthtech, sports tech, agritech and createch.

These 5 early-stage tech companies have an average of 5 employees, and have raised an average of £1,180,000 in investment funding to date.

Northern Ireland's tech sector is growing

The success of these early-stage Northern Ireland tech companies reflects the strength and fast growth of Northern Ireland's tech sector overall.

According to data from Tech Nation, Northern Ireland is home to 2 tech 'unicorns' (companies valued at over \$1bn), and has received \$34.5mn in VC investment funding this year, as of November 2021 (a 49% increase on the \$23.1mn received in 2020).

Tech job creation is also growing rapidly in Northern Ireland, rising by 306% in the past year (from 4,041 tech roles in 2020 to 16,417 in H1 of 2021).

This year's Rising Stars Regional Winners are accelerating the tech sector across the UK

This year's Regional Winners demonstrate that the tech sector is growing quickly across all corners of the UK.

An impressive 69% of the 55 Regional Winners are generating revenue, and 38% have at least one female founder. 27% of the Regional Finalists are Pre-Seed, 29% have no previous rounds of funding, and 36% are Seed funded. As for what's next, 49% of the Regional Finalists are looking for Seed Funding, while 34% are looking to raise Series A.

The 55 Regional Winners are a mixture of B2B and B2C and 49% have previously attended an accelerator. 73% of the Regional Winners plan to expand internationally in the next 12 months, with 58% wanting to expand into the USA.

Rising Stars' mission

Going forward, these 5 promising, fast-growth Northern Irish tech companies will continue to be supported by the UK tech ecosystem as they are inducted into the Tech Nation alumni network. This will allow the companies national recognition, greater access to networking opportunities and more opportunities to learn from other early-stage tech businesses going through a similar scaling journey.

Recognising and empowering all of the Regional Winners of the Rising Stars competition is at the core of Tech Nation's mission to fuel the growth of tech scaleups who are helping us create a stronger economy, society and future.

Quotes:

Esme Caulfield, Competitions Lead at Tech Nation, said: "With Tech Nation's Rising Stars competition now in its fourth year, it's amazing to see so many inspiring companies innovating to change our world for the better. This year, we reached the milestone of 1000 applications to Rising Stars (and surpassed it!). We had a record number of applications this year - 380 (nearly 400) - and we also saw our first applications - and our first Regional Winner - from the spacetech sector, (Elestial, from the Midlands) and agritech (Cropsafe, from Northern Ireland).

From revolutionising modern healthcare and disrupting the finance sector to transforming education and tackling climate change, each of these fast-growing regional early-stage tech companies is helping us improve our economy, society and quality of life. This year's Regional Winners represent the brightest and the best of UK tech and talent, and I'm excited to see what they do next."

Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said: "These technology Rising Stars are helping us solve some of the greatest challenges of our time and creating high-quality and well-paid jobs up and down the country. Capitalising on the huge potential of tech is a crucial part of our mission to level up and we

are backing businesses with pro-innovation policies and supporting people to get the skills they need to thrive."

Nicola McNeely, Partner at Harrison Clark Rickerbys Solicitors - Cardiff and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: "It is evident from the Tech Nation's Rising Stars Regional Winners that there is a vast array of technology startups and scaleups around the UK, many of whom are operating within known Tech clusters already. Some have chosen to specifically establish themselves there or to relocate to these areas to leverage the incubator or accelerator services within those tech clusters. The ability to operate alongside like-minded businesses equips them well to leverage contacts, connections, services and expertise from similar businesses in their area. It also positions them well to sell into primes who are interested in diversifying their customer offering and adopting new innovative tech solutions."

Drew Currie, Director of the Founder Institute - Birmingham and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: "Two of the Rising Star candidates which I judged were extraordinary! I have judged pitches previously, but these 2 were exceptional. I have written their names on a piece of paper, and sealed them in dated envelopes. On the back of their Tech Nation entry, I look forward in a few years time to opening those envelopes in front of them & toasting their success!"

Niki Haggerty-James, Ecosystem Manager at Barclays Eagle Labs and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: "I was honoured to be a judge for the fourth year, for Tech Nation's Rising Stars programme. It seems the calibre of start-up and scaling-up businesses is getting better year on year, which is reflected in the businesses we are seeing here at Barclays Eagle Labs. When times become challenging, the best entrepreneurs see it as an opportunity to innovate and adapt. I predict exciting times ahead for this year's cohort."

Daniel Evans, CEO of Birmingham Enterprise Community and Rising Stars 4.0 Judge, said: "Rising Stars aims to find the UK's very best emerging startups and this year's applications did not disappoint. As we look forward to the country's recovery from COVID and the events of the past 2 years, we need our entrepreneurs more than ever. They fuel innovation and tackle the problems we face by building solutions that change the way we live, work and operate as a society. Through Rising Stars, Tech Nation is able to help showcase some of these fantastic entrepreneurs and bring attention to the work they are doing. One thing is for sure, if the quality of these businesses is anything to go by, then the entrepreneurial future of the UK is looking stronger than ever."

Andrew Moffett, Head of Marketing at Kairos Sports Tech, said: "Technology is only getting more critical in each professional environment and we're here to play our part in the development of world class planning and communication tools for elite sports teams across the globe. We're really pleased to be a part of Tech Nation, and delighted to be recognised in this way and be amongst some amazing young companies that share our ambition and drive."

Michelle Connor, Founder and CEO of Kinva, said: "Our mission is to make health therapy provision more efficient, effective, and accessible to all. With waiting lists their longest in history, rising energy costs, and deteriorating population health, Kinva allows therapists to securely manage their caseload, provide clear, joined-up multidisciplinary care, and reduce the need for clinics. It guides. It supports."

It gets results. More therapy practices are realising the cost savings, client engagement and retention, and improved outcomes that Kinva brings. Northern Ireland punches well above its weight for homegrown, high-calibre tech talent. All of our team members are based in NI - without their skills and expertise, there would be no Kinva."

Chris Armstrong, CEO of Overwatch Research, said: "We are delighted to be recognised as a Rising Stars 4.0 Regional Winner. This has been a game-changer for other businesses in previous years and we are excited for the opportunity that lies ahead for Overwatch. We have received great support from Tech Nation Northern Ireland in the form of general startup support and introductions to investors."

John McElhone, CEO & Co-founder of CropSafe, said: "At CropSafe, we're aiming to help bring digital tools and the benefits of modern-day technologies such as satellite or weather data to the tens of millions of farms worldwide, to those who need and benefit most. We're incredibly grateful and humbled to take part in Tech Nation's Rising Stars competition this year as a stepping stone along our journey to change the future of agriculture."

JP McCorley, Founder & CEO of Ecko, said: "It's amazing to be part of Rising Stars 4.0 and to elevate the artistic among us, highlighting their importance to society. We exist to liberate artists, initially music creators, from the shackles of ineffective, overcomplicated, and unfair technologies. Our mission is to empower artists to create their best work more often and help them connect more deeply with their fans through the latest emerging technologies. We're creating a future where artists will be able to sustain themselves on a core community of 1000 true fans, freeing them to live as independent creators, earning a healthy living while making what they love. For the first time in forever, artists can be excited about what the future holds for them and we, as both artists and fans, can look forward to connecting more deeply with them."

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Notes to the editor:

About the Northern Ireland Regional Winners:

[Overwatch Research](#) - Belfast - Healthtech

Overwatch is an all-in-one software used by pharmaceutical companies to assist with developing drugs for some of the world's most critical illnesses including cancer, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. By aiming to reduce the high failure rate of clinical trials in the pharmaceutical industry largely caused by poor quality preclinical data. Overwatch's software greatly increases the reliability of data and eliminates errors experienced in commonly performed studies by 100%.

[Kinva](#) - Lisburn - Healthtech

Kinva is a game-changing digital platform connecting health therapists and their clients. Through one-to-one support and tailored plans, Kinva creates a healthier future for patients, connecting them with health therapists and improving the effectiveness of therapy.

[Kairos Sports Tech](#) - Belfast - Sports tech

Kairos is a central communications hub for elite sports teams. The online web app and mobile platform allows teams to seamlessly and efficiently manage all aspects of team communication including; scheduling, messaging, subjective data collection, travel, and u18 guardian communication.

[CropSafe](#) - Belfast - Agritech

CropSafe aggregates weather and satellite data to provide better, more accurate guidance for farmers who want to fix on-farm issues like blight. With the power of satellite data, CropSafe makes insights and financing easier to understand, and helps farmers make more profitable decisions.

[Ecko](#) - Antrim - Createch

Ecko is a first of its kind collaboration platform that allows its users to monetise their sessions as NFTs. Ecko promises to empower and connect music creators through transformative technology.

Company photos:

Please find images of the companies' logos and founders [here](#), and of their teams [here](#).

About the Rising Stars competition:

Rising Stars 4.0 is the UK's only truly national scaleup competition, designed to be accessible to the best early-stage tech companies from all areas of the country. Entrants are supported throughout the application process, and given training and support at each stage of the competition to enable them to compete to their best ability and deliver the perfect pitch. The competition culminates in the top 20 companies being showcased and promoted to a highly curated audience of investors, corporates, influencers and the wider tech ecosystem. The judging panel then deliberate over the final 20, selecting 10 companies to be named as this year's Rising Stars, who will feature in a high-profile celebration event on 24 March 2022.

Eligibility criteria for the Rising Stars competition:

- Seed to pre-Series A funding stage OR if revenue focused, generating annual revenues below £1.5mn
- A digital tech business with a product or service to sell
- At least one active client or pilot
- Able to demonstrate market traction
- HQ'd in UK
- Company incorporated between 1-3 years
- Able to commit to key dates in the Rising Stars calendar

About Tech Nation:

Tech Nation is the leading growth platform for UK tech scaleups. Tech Nation fuels the growth of game-changing founders, leaders, and scaling companies so they can positively transform societies

and economies. We provide them with the coaching, content, and community they need for their journey in designing the future. Tech Nation has years of experience facilitating and helping UK tech companies scale, both at home and abroad. Over 30 cohorts and 900 companies have successfully graduated from Tech Nation's growth programmes. Alumni include Skyscanner, Darktrace, and Monzo, as well as 3 of the UK's 7 new 'decacorns'; Revolut, Wise, and Farfetch.