

Louis Madden announced as overall winner of SciFest 2015!

~ Monaghan student picks up top award for his project that looked at carrying out genetic testing and DNA research simply, cheaply and efficiently ~

~ Louis will represent Ireland in the Phoenix Arizona at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair 2016 ~

Friday 6th November – Louis Madden, a fifth year student from Largy College, Clones, Co Monaghan was this afternoon named the overall winner of SciFest 2015, for his project that looked at whether genetic testing and DNA research can be carried out simply, cheaply and efficiently. SciFest is an all-island science initiative which fosters active, collaborative and inquiry-based learning among second level students. This year saw a record number of over 7,200 students exhibiting their projects in local and regional science fairs across the country. Louis was one of 48 students who went on to exhibit their 27 STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) projects at the national final held in the Marino Conference Centre in Dublin today.

Prof. Mark Ferguson, Director General of SFI, presented Louis with his prize – the SciFest 2015 Grand Award. The prize includes the opportunity to represent Ireland at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) 2016 in Phoenix, Arizona.

Louis found that important genetic research was often limited by the cost of the necessary equipment. He spent just under €150 on cheap and recycled material to build several pieces of laboratory equipment including a vortex, centrifuge, PCR, transilluminator, gel box with power supply and gel camera. Using this equipment, he isolated and amplified chloroplast DNA using a proprietary DNA extraction kit. Comparing his results with those of other tests of the same material he demonstrated that genetic testing could be done in a simpler, cheaper and more effective manner.

SciFest is funded primarily by the SFI Discover Programme, Intel Ireland and Boston Scientific.

Sheila Porter, SciFest CEO, said: *"Each year the standard of projects exhibited at SciFest gets better and better, the students really are making it difficult for the judges to pick a winner. All projects exhibited show that when students engage with STEM outside the classroom, they*

bring their learning to a new level and produce amazing results. Participation in SciFest helps students to develop the skills sets essential for the next generation of creative problem solvers and entrepreneurs. The innovation and the creativity on display at the national final is a testament to the hard-work and dedication put in by the students and their teachers. Louis will be representing Ireland at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in the USA next year and I am confident he will do us proud."

Congratulating the students on their achievements Richard Bruton T.D., Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation said: *"A key part of our Action Plan for Jobs is encouraging more students to choose science and maths subjects in second and third level. This will help us produce the skilled workers we need for the enterprise economy, and also to ensure that we have more innovative ideas being developed which can ultimately be turned into commercial outputs and jobs. SciFest is a great example of this effort, and I have been hugely impressed by both the dedication and the quality of scientific research shown in all these projects. I am delighted to have been able to be here to see first hand these amazing young scientists, thanks to all the parents and teachers for supporting these students, and I wish all involved every success in the future. Finally, a huge well done to Louis on his great achievement"*.

Professor Mark Ferguson, Director General of Science Foundation Ireland and Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government said: *"SciFest is an annual celebration of STEM and once again has proven a big success. It is very encouraging to see so many diverse and exciting projects and to hear about the students inspiring work and commitment. Special mention must also go to the teachers, parents and friends who guide and encourage this interest in STEM. SciFest is a very important initiative that encourages an interest in STEM among students. Science, technology, engineering and maths are crucial for Ireland's future economic development and what we are witnessing here are the future entrepreneurs and industrial leaders of our country.*

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For further information

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