

2026 Research Awards

Entry guidelines

Contents

Award categories.....	2
Research & Innovation Community	2
Research Excellence.....	2
Sustainability Research	3
Impact Through Engagement	3
Assessment criteria	4
Eligibility.....	5
Key dates.....	7

Introduction

In our centenary year, the University's inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Awards will bring together Professional Services, Teaching and Learning, and Research to celebrate exceptional contributions at a single, combined ceremony.

As part of this wider celebration, the Research Awards will showcase both researchers and professional services staff whose work demonstrates excellence, drives progress against our [Research and Innovation Strategy](#), and addresses real-world challenges.

Excellence can take many forms, and we encourage applications from all research themes and associated functions across the University.

Research Awards 2026 – Entry guidelines

Entries will be judged on clarity of purpose, creativity and innovation, and clear outcomes and impact. Winners will receive £1000 towards their next research activity.

[Apply using the VC Awards Research Entry Form](#) by 5pm on Friday 20 March 2026.

Award categories

The four research categories are:

Research & Innovation Community

This award celebrates individuals or teams who have produced outstanding work to **support and strengthen a positive and resilient research culture** at the University, including:

- Activity that champions open and responsible research, going beyond open access publishing to pioneer new models of accessibility, integrity and shared discovery
- Initiatives that foster collaboration and break down silos, through approaches such as peer-to-peer learning, communities of practice and interdisciplinary partnerships
- Activity that advances equality, diversity and inclusion, ensuring fairness and broad participation across the research community
- Activity that supports career development by providing mentoring, coaching or skills training across roles and career stages.

Research Excellence

This award celebrates individuals or teams whose research demonstrates **outstanding originality, rigour and impact** across any of the University's four research themes, including:

- Transformative projects that generate lasting societal, economic or cultural benefits
- Interdisciplinary research that fuels innovation and delivers real-world solutions
- Work that influences policy, practice or public discourse locally, nationally or globally

Research Awards 2026 – Entry guidelines

- Research that pioneers new knowledge or methodology, setting benchmarks for excellence in its field.

Sustainability Research

This award celebrates individuals or teams who have produced **world-class research that supports a transition to sustainable and fair future societies**, including:

- Interdisciplinary research that harnesses diverse perspectives to co-create solutions for complex societal challenges relating to sustainability
- Research that addresses climate change, delivering innovative solutions for mitigation and adaptation at local, national or global scales
- Projects that protect and restore ecosystems through nature-based approaches to safeguard biodiversity
- Activity that advances sustainable and resilient food systems, tackling global shocks and adapting to a changing climate.

Impact Through Engagement

This award celebrates individuals or teams who have **created impact through engagement and collaboration** with communities, businesses and organisations outside of academia, including:

- Activity that deepens local and regional engagement, creating partnerships that deliver social, cultural or economic benefits
- Creative approaches to sharing research and engaging diverse audiences, inspiring understanding and dialogue beyond academia
- Activity that translates discoveries into real-world applications, influencing policy or driving innovation and economic growth through commercialisation.
- Projects that have employed innovative ways for external groups to contribute, such as citizen science, participatory action research or industry partnerships.

Assessment criteria

Entries will be assessed by a panel of judges that will include academics, impact and engagement experts, and communications professionals from within the University. The judging panel will use the following assessment criteria to inform their decisions and will shortlist two entries in each category and make one award per category. All entries will be assessed against the following criteria. Please ensure you address the criteria in your application.

- **Clarity of purpose (25%):** The activity's purpose should be clear with defined aims and objectives. The audience/participants should be well defined and the chosen method of engagement appropriate to meet the aims.
- **Creativity and innovation (25%):** Activities should show originality and use creative ways of engaging with others. This may be that creative use was made of resources (people, places, materials, budget), aspects of the project were innovative, risks were taken or that it was communicated in an innovative way.
- **Outcomes (25%):** The entry should demonstrate how successful the activity has been in terms of short-term, immediate changes such as how it has benefited the audience/participants, and whether it has led to new developments, ways of working or collaborations. This may include critical evaluation and reflection that will help build best practice for future projects. Please include reflections on the success of the project as part of your entry.
- **Impact (25%):** The entry should demonstrate how the outcomes are being put into place in society or the academic world. This will include how the activity has achieved or demonstrated wider, tangible change in thinking, culture, policy or practice. It should demonstrate reach or significance and should include examples and evidence of uptake beyond outcomes. If a project is not

Research Awards 2026 – Entry guidelines

yet fully realised, entrants will need to show they are well on their way to achieving impact.

Note: Entries for the R&I Community Award will be assessed on the longer-term impact the activity has had on ways of working or practice within the University.

Eligibility

- The activity/ies must either be ongoing or have been completed within the last two years (i.e. since January 2024).
- Academics and professional staff supporting research (for example, technical staff, museums staff, research services staff) are eligible to enter.
- Entrants can be at any career stage, and activities of any scale are welcome.
- Entries may be nominated by another member of staff or staff can nominate themselves in all categories.
- Entries can only be submitted to one award category. If activity/ies potentially fit more than one category, please choose the most appropriate.
- Entrants can submit more than one project. More than one activity/ies can be submitted to the same category as long as the activity/ies are completely separate.
- The Awards are open to individuals or groups, but group entries must be submitted by one named individual who will be the lead contact for the entry.
- The lead contact must be a current staff member of the University and still expected to be in post by 31 July 2026.
- Group entries can include staff (researchers, PhD students, academics, teaching staff, professional services staff) or individuals from outside the University.

Research Awards 2026 – Entry guidelines

- PhD-led projects will not be eligible for entry in any category, although PhD students may be part of a team. See the Graduate School web pages for details of [competitions for research students](#), including the Doctoral Research for a Better World award. These will be celebrated at the Doctoral Research Conference on 17 June 2026.
- Previous winners or shortlisted entrants of the Research Awards or Research Engagement and Impact Awards may not apply again with the same project for 3 years after having been selected, and if applying again once the 3 years has passed, must demonstrate a clear difference/improvement between the two submissions.
- At least one person per shortlisted application will be expected to attend the awards event on 23 June 2026. Please note that the number of invitations to the showcase/awards event per winning entry may be limited.
- Shortlisted entries will be promoted via internal and external communication channels. Winners will be expected to participate in a short film which will be used to showcase their work/project internally and externally. All content will be sent for approval to the lead contact, prior to publication.
- Activities where the primary purpose is to increase student applications to the University are not eligible.
- Incomplete entries will not be taken forward.
- After submission, applications will be screened for eligibility by the Research Communications and Engagement team.
- All eligible entries will be shared with the judging panel who will score the applications based on the information provided in the application form and supporting documents and based on the assessment criteria (outlined in the entry guidelines above).
- The judging panel reserve the right to move applications to another award category if they think the application is better suited to a different category.

Research Awards 2026 – Entry guidelines

- The scores will inform the discussion of the panel but will not be used as a decision tool itself. This is in line with the [responsible metrics statement](#).
- The award decision is made through the judging panel's discussion. The judging panel is tasked with assessing the quality, effort and commitment of each entry and delivery of the activity to achieve its stated aims.
- Awards are at the judging panel's discretion.

Key dates

- [Apply using the Research Awards Entry Form](#) by 5pm on Friday 20 March 2026
- All entrants informed of decision: week commencing Monday 11 May 2026
- Winners and highly commended entries will be invited to Vice-Chancellor's Awards celebration event on Tuesday 23 June 2026

Enquiries welcome. Please contact:

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