



IHE Awards 2026

An annual celebration recognising the innovation and excellent practice taking place in independent higher education providers, rewarding quality across the full breadth of IHE Member activity.

How to enter and tips

IHE Awards are open to current [IHE Members](#) only and nominees may enter as many categories as they wish. Please read the [Terms and Conditions](#) at the end of this pack ahead of submitting an entry.

All nominations must be submitted online via the official nomination form (excluding the two 'Outstanding Contributions' categories). Entries will be judged on the information submitted via the nomination form alone.

For each entry, nominees must demonstrate how they meet the award criteria. Entries do not need to fulfil all criteria, but completion of a minimum of one criteria section is required for each award.

The total word count for each award submission should be no more than **700 words**.

Members are encouraged to revisit previous winners: [2025](#), [2024](#), [2023](#) to see examples of the types of projects, programmes, initiatives and strategies that gained recognition, along with a summary of judges' comments and feedback on what made them stand out.

Deadline for entries

The deadline for entries **Thursday 3 September 2026**.

Shortlists and winners

Shortlists will be published by early November. Winners will be announced at the IHE Awards ceremony on the evening of **Wednesday 18 November 2026** at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP London) immediately following the [IHE Annual Conference 2026](#).

Award categories

The awards feature 11 categories spanning key areas of impact, including three new additions and two updated categories.

Empowering Student Voice | Sponsored by [Coole Insight](#)

Global Graduates – NEW! | Sponsored by [Pearson](#)

Industry Collaboration

Inspiring Course

International Partnership – NEW! | Sponsored by [Anderson Quigley](#)

Social Impact – NEW!

Supporting Student Success | Sponsored by [Applied Inspiration - SEER](#)

Technology Enhanced Learning

Rising Star

Outstanding Contribution to the IHE Community (Individual)

Outstanding Contribution to the IHE Community (Provider)

Award sponsors

We would like to thank our sponsors for their valued contribution to the IHE Awards 2026, enabling us to recognise and celebrate the innovation and excellence within the independent higher education sector.





EMPOWERING STUDENT VOICE



The perspectives and experiences of students are more important than ever in the creation and delivery of inclusive and responsive higher education.

The **Empowering Student Voice** award recognises IHE Members who are empowering students to use their voice to effect change and make a positive difference, either in their institution or the wider community.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Members should tell us how they are meaningfully engaging their students demonstrating **one or more** of the following criteria:

- empowering students to lead projects, initiatives or campaigns that demonstrate student voice in action – including co-curricular, extra-curricular and community based activity that positively impacts learners, the institution or the wider public;
- facilitating and supporting student representation through formal and informal structures, enabling students to actively influence policies, practices, and long term strategic direction;
- creating equitable and accessible ways for diverse students to contribute, recognising barriers to participation, and adapting engagement models to ensure inclusive student voice representation.

Previous award-winning initiative

The 2025 winner demonstrated how student voice was embedded across all stages of institutional planning, with students acting as co-developers through governance roles, design projects, and community initiatives that shaped curriculum, learning environments, wellbeing support, and civic engagement.

Judges noted the clear impact of co-creating initiatives with students, moving from consultation to a sustained collaboration culture to embed the student voice in the institution's governance.

ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY



GLOBAL GRADUATES



In an interconnected world, preparing students for global careers and challenges is a defining marker of an ambitious higher education provider.

The new **Global Graduates** award recognises IHE Members who are embedding global skills, perspectives and experiences into their UK programmes to produce world-ready graduates.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Successful nominations clearly demonstrate measurable impact, showing a purposeful approach to internationalising the student experience and enhancing students' global employability, outlook, and readiness to succeed in a global context.

Members should describe a specific project or institution-wide strategy that demonstrates **one or more** of the following:

- embeds global employability skills into the curriculum, equipping students with the competencies needed to thrive in international careers and diverse workplaces
- fosters global outlooks and intercultural understanding through co-curricular activity, internationalised content or cross-cultural learning opportunities
- provides meaningful global experiences, including industry placements, education exchanges or language programmes that connect students with the wider world
- supports the internationalisation of the student body, creating an inclusive environment where home and international students learn from and with each other
- integrates global perspectives into curriculum design, ensuring content reflects international contexts, challenges and opportunities
- partners with international employers or industry bodies to align graduate skills with global workforce needs.

Characteristics of a strong nomination

Providers embed global employability skills and international perspectives across the curriculum, foster intercultural understanding, offer global experiences, and demonstrate inclusive learning environments and employer partnerships aligned to global workforce needs.

ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY



INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

Industry engagement is a defining feature of the independent higher education sector.

The **Industry Collaboration** award recognises IHE Members who demonstrate innovative, strategic and sustainable approaches to building and maintaining links with industry.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Successful nominations will clearly demonstrate **measurable impact**, showing how the collaboration has delivered **meaningful benefits** for students, industry partners and the wider community.

Members should describe a specific project or an institution-wide strategy that demonstrates **one or more** of the following criteria:

- integrates industry practitioners into the curriculum or co-curricular activity
- delivers meaningful knowledge-exchange initiatives with industry partners
- establishes best practice that enhances or raises industry or professional standards
- responds to local or regional skills needs by connecting learners with real-world community or employer projects
- drives new research, innovation, or emerging practice that expands subject or industry knowledge
- creates pathways or collaborative opportunities that widen access and participation to industries for underrepresented groups.

Previous award-winning initiative

The 2025 winner described a partnership with a local community food organisation addressing food insecurity, outlined meaningful benefits for all involved, including industry-led experience for students, and demonstrated clear, measurable impact through tangible outcomes and delivery at scale.

Judges noted strong and effective community engagement, and commitment to harnessing collaborative partnerships with employers, showing how academia and enterprise can unite to deliver impact.

ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY



INSPIRING COURSE

Independent providers are known for doing things differently.

The **Inspiring Course** award recognises IHE Members who are transforming the learning experience of students and delivering impact through innovative course design, content and delivery.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Members should choose a specific course (as best defined in your context) and tell us how its design, content and/or delivery demonstrates **one or more** of the following:

- uses innovative technology, pedagogy or practice to provide a unique and impactful student learning experience
- engages different knowledge and skills from across, and outside of, the education sector
- is co-created with students
- responds to industry need for education in niche or developing areas

Previous award-winning initiative

The 2025 winner was Art Thinking from ESCP Business School. They brought together two subject areas to support learning.

Judges noted the success of bringing together two very different subject areas to support learning, impressed at how students are encouraged to develop alternative ways of problem solving and embrace new situations beyond subject boundaries.

[ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY](#)



INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

ANDERSON
QUIGLEY | SEARCH
INTERIM
ADVISORY

Independent higher education providers are shaping global education through bold and innovative international partnerships.

The **International Partnership** award recognises IHE Members who have developed inspiring collaborations with education, community or industry partners outside the UK that deliver meaningful impact.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Successful nominations will demonstrate agility, responsiveness, and a commitment to addressing real-world needs, with clear, **measurable impact** and meaningful benefits for students, partner organisations, and the wider communities it serves.

Members should describe a specific partnership or programme of international collaborative activity that demonstrates **one or more** of the following:

- delivers meaningful collaboration with an education or community partner outside the UK that responds to an identified industry, education or community need
- develops or enhances products, services or knowledge through international industry collaboration with partners outside the UK
- expands access to high-quality education internationally, including through transnational education (TNE) or other innovative delivery models
- tackles pressing global challenges, such as improving access and participation for women and girls, strengthening foundational learning, or embedding climate adaptation and resilience.
- demonstrates agility and responsiveness in establishing or adapting partnerships to meet emerging or evolving needs
- strengthens the UK's global education relationships by building sustainable, reciprocal partnerships that benefit both UK and international partners and communities

Characteristics of a strong nomination

Providers collaborate internationally to meet identified needs through shared provision, widened access via innovative delivery, and action on global challenges, with strong submissions evidencing reciprocal partnerships and lasting UK–international impact.

[**ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY**](#)



SOCIAL IMPACT

Independent higher education providers play a key role in advancing environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and effective governance (ESG) across the sector.

The new **Social Impact** award recognises IHE Members who show strong leadership through practical, evidence-based initiatives. It celebrates those embedding ESG across operations, teaching, partnerships, and culture, while delivering clear progress, integrity, and meaningful benefits for students, staff, and the wider community.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Successful nominations will clearly demonstrate **measurable impact**, showing how ESG initiatives have delivered meaningful benefits.

Members should describe a specific initiative or an institution-wide approach that demonstrates **one or more** of the following:

- implements initiatives that reduce environmental impact, promote sustainable practices, or embed environmental education and awareness within teaching and learning
- strengthens community wellbeing, equality, diversity and inclusion, or contributes to positive social outcomes for learners and local communities
- demonstrates transparent, ethical, and accountable decision-making and strong leadership, with structures that ensure long-term sustainability and integrity
- shows how ESG principles are embedded across policies, partnerships, investment decisions, institutional culture and strategic planning
- involves staff, students, industry and/or community partners in driving sustainable and socially responsible change.

Characteristics of a strong nomination

A whole-institution sustainability and social impact programme focused on reducing environmental impact and strengthening community wellbeing. Working with staff and students, providers implement practical actions across energy, waste, curriculum, and community partnerships, with impact evidenced through measurable environmental, student, and governance outcomes.

ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY



SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS



IHE champions the inclusive and innovative approaches members use to support every learner to succeed. Behind the metrics are human stories of how providers create supportive environments, remove barriers, and help learners thrive throughout and beyond their studies.

The **Supporting Student Success** award recognises IHE Members who take proactive approaches to supporting students throughout the student journey.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Members should describe a specific initiative or an institution-wide approach that demonstrates **one or more** of the following:

- implements targeted interventions throughout the student journey, from entry through to course completion and into employment
- co-creates support services, resources or enhancements in partnership with students
- responds to the needs of diverse learners, including widening participation groups, international students, students with disabilities, and those with other protected characteristics
- engages staff across academic, professional and specialist roles to create a whole-institution approach to student success.

Previous award-winning initiative

The 2025 winner demonstrated how student success sits at the heart of their mission, with every aspect of the institution—its location, curriculum, support, partnerships, teaching, and funding—intentionally designed to widen participation and help every learner thrive. Their small scale enables personalised support, with strong staff commitment, co-created learning design, and comprehensive services ensuring students receive tailored guidance throughout their studies.

Judges noted that underpinned by principles of widening participation, staff across the institution work collectively to remove structural entry barriers and provide targeted support to cultivate technical proficiency, reduce financial pressures, and improve student wellbeing.

[ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY](#)



TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED LEARNING

The changing nature of higher education delivery demands that providers keep pace with developments in digital learning methods to meet the needs of students.

The **Technology Enhanced Learning** award recognises IHE Members who are evolving their use of technology to enhance the learner experience.

Criteria and guidance for your entry

Members should tell us how, across their programmes or in a specific context, they demonstrate **one or more** of the following:

- use innovative digital delivery methods
- demonstrate excellence in teaching digital skills relevant to their specialism
- create a supportive environment for staff and students to develop their digital literacy
- integrate emerging technologies, such as AI tools or VR, to enhance the student learning experience

Previous award-winning initiative

The 2025 winner demonstrated how they transformed learning through a fully integrated AI Tutor ecosystem supporting personalised learning, employability, and high-quality teaching, combining adaptive pathways, AI-driven feedback, virtual roleplay, and job preparation tools. Students engaged in structured pre-, in-, and post-class activities, while analytics enabled targeted support, resulting in improved engagement, participation, and confidence in academic and professional skills.

Judges noted their highly innovative AI-tutor ecosystem, which is adapted to the specific needs of their student population, their strong focus on wraparound employability support, and commitment to upskilling staff.

ENTER IN THIS CATEGORY



The **Rising Star** award recognises individuals whose sustained engagement, collaborative spirit and growing influence within the IHE community enrich member experience and support the practical delivery of IHE's work.

This individual will be known for:

- actively sharing knowledge, experience and expertise through participation in IHE Networks, Forums and roundtables
- providing informal peer support, advice and knowledge-sharing within the IHE community
- fostering collaboration, collegiality and positive relationships across the IHE community
- consistently engaging with IHE activities and strengthening connections between members
- contributing to the development and delivery of IHE community activity
- demonstrating commitment and passion in their area of work.

Previous award-winner

The 2025 winner was noted for her collegial approach and commitment to the IHE community, regularly sharing expertise as a network co-chair, speaking at key forums, and representing IHE Members with insight and integrity. Her trusted voice inspires confidence and her passion for advancing independent higher education makes her an invaluable advocate for IHE.

[NOMINATE IN THIS CATEGORY](#)



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE IHE COMMUNITY (INDIVIDUAL)

The **Outstanding Contribution to the IHE Community (Individual)** award recognises individuals whose leadership, advocacy, and long-term commitment have made a transformative impact on the IHE community and its role in the wider higher education sector, leaving a lasting legacy.

This individual will be known for:

- formally representing independent providers in sector and national-level discussions, influencing policy and advancing the IHE mission with key stakeholders
- shaping strategic conversations and providing authoritative insight at IHE conferences, meetings and events
- offering guidance, support and advice to other IHE members
- acting as a visible ambassador for the IHE community
- driving the visibility and reputation of IHE and independent providers within the wider higher education sector
- demonstrating sustained leadership, advocacy and commitment that has made a significant and lasting impact on the work and reputation of IHE

Previous award-winner

The 2025 winner was selected in recognition of his lasting and meaningful imprint on the work of IHE. From shaping policy and challenging regulatory decisions to driving widening participation and forging high-profile partnerships to enhance the student experience, his leadership and commitment to the cause has left a legacy of opportunity and excellence.

To propose a nominee for this award, please contact info@ihe.ac.uk. Winners in this category will be determined by the IHE Board.



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE IHE COMMUNITY (PROVIDER)

The **Outstanding Contribution to the IHE Community (Provider)** award recognises IHE member institutions at an **organisational level** that have demonstrated a strong commitment to the IHE community and actively supported our work as a representative body.

This member will be known for:

- collaborating with other IHE members
- offering support and guidance to other IHE members
- actively participating in IHE events, offering speakers from within their organisation
- encouraging their staff and students to take roles on IHE committees or staff networks, and participate in forums or roundtable discussions
- representing the IHE community at a national level through engagement with broader sector activity, or by taking governance roles.

Previous award-winner

The 2025 winner was recognised as a leading advocate for independent providers, demonstrating what is possible for the future of higher education. The team actively contributes to the IHE community through training, events, and sector discussions, sharing best practice on innovation, flexible partnerships, and regulatory challenges. Senior leaders also engage with sector bodies and government to champion lifelong learning. Despite being a small team, they consistently show collaboration and creativity, reflecting IHE's core value of innovation.

Nominations are not open for this award. The recipient will be determined by the IHE Board.

Terms and Conditions

Eligibility

- IHE Awards are open to current [IHE Members](#) only.
- Nominations must be submitted by the deadline of **23:59 on Thursday 3 September**. Entries received after this date will not be considered.
- Only one entry per member organisation, per category, will be accepted. Where multiple entries are submitted within the same category, the Head of Institution of the relevant member organisation will be contacted to determine which entry should be accepted.
- Members may enter more than one award category, but each entry must be a unique submission. The same nomination cannot be submitted to multiple categories. Duplicate submissions will not be accepted.
- If the nomination relates to an initiative or project carried out in collaboration with another member institution, the submission should come from the lead institution.

Nomination process

- All nominations must be submitted online via the official nomination form.
- Nominees must demonstrate how they meet the award criteria. Completion of a minimum of one criteria section is required for each award.
- Nominations will be assessed against the published criteria.
- Entries will be judged on the information submitted via the nomination form alone. Web links to further information may be incorporated into relevant sections but should not be used excessively.
- Supplementary material, such as images or supporting documents, will not be considered and should not be sent as separate files.
- The main submission is limited to a **maximum of 700 words**. Entries exceeding this word count will not be accepted.

Judging process

- With the exception of the Outstanding Contribution and Rising Star categories, awards will be judged by an independent panel formed of representatives from across the higher education community and supporting organisations.
- Judges will be selected for their expertise and impartiality.
- Judges will be asked to declare potential conflicts of interest in relation to nominees. IHE will implement appropriate measures to ensure fair assessment.
- The winners of the Outstanding Contribution and Rising Star awards will be determined by the IHE Board.
- Judging decisions are final. No further correspondence will be entered into.

Intellectual property, data protection and confidentiality

- Nominees retain ownership of submitted nominations.
- By submitting a nomination, nominees grant IHE the right to use the synopsis of their award entry in promotional materials across digital platforms, including the IHE website, social media channels, and email communications.
- IHE may refer to the practice highlighted in award entries as part of ongoing engagement with external stakeholders, including government departments, regulatory bodies, and sector organisations.
- Consent for the publication of extracts from award entries in other IHE materials and outputs will be sought, where appropriate.
- Any personal data collected through nominations will be handled securely and processed in accordance with GDPR.
- IHE will respect and protect the confidentiality of any information specifically identified as confidential or commercially sensitive.

Awards ceremony and recognition

- Winners will be announced at the IHE Awards ceremony, which takes place on the evening of Wednesday 18 November 2026 at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP London).
- Winners will receive an award trophy and customised IHE Awards logo with guidelines for use.
- IHE retains ownership and copyright of IHE Awards logos.
- IHE Awards are solely for the intended recipient and are non-transferable: awards conferred on an individual may not be assigned to an institution.
- IHE retains the right to request the removal of IHE Awards logos from materials where there has been a breach of conditions of use or evidence of misleading association.
- IHE will publish case studies of awards winners.
- Media coverage and publicity opportunities may be provided.

Compliance and conduct

- All information included in nominations must be accurate and verifiable. The submission of false or misleading information will result in immediate disqualification.
- Members under investigation by IHE are not eligible to enter (see [IHE Membership Regulations: M10](#)).
- Entries received from Members who are suspended or placed on investigatory probation during the nomination and judging window will be discounted and immediately removed from the process.
- Previous winners whose membership is subsequently suspended or terminated will lose the right to be publicly recognised as an IHE Award winner.
- IHE reserves the right to revoke an award if inaccurate information is discovered after an award has been granted.
- Awards may also be withdrawn from individuals who are implicated in misconduct or where there is evidence of behaviour incompatible with the values of IHE.

If you have any questions regarding these terms and conditions or would like to know more about the IHE Awards, please contact Fiona Jones, Events and Training Manager: fiona@ihe.ac.uk.