



# THE AWARDS 2020

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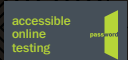
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# Editor's introduction



In an extraordinary year, the opportunity to sit down with the *Times Higher Education* Awards judges – remotely, of course – and immerse oneself in the stories behind our shortlisted entries was more rewarding than ever.

Because the awards recognise achievements in the 2018-19 academic year, we are dealing with the world as it was pre-pandemic. Perhaps that is why spending time with the entries was such a pleasure.

Regardless of the timing, though, the brilliance on display in every category, from institutions the length and breadth of the country, is a reminder of the role that universities must, and will, play in guiding the way through this crisis.

From the brilliance of our researchers to the exceptional teaching and the extraordinary

ingenuity shown by administrative staff, examples of innovation abound – which will be critical for both universities and the country in the period ahead.

In some ways, picking out examples of individual achievement seems at odds with the collective effort that has been so vital during the difficult months this year.

But the *THE* Awards have been celebrating the UK sector in this way for 16 years, so a pandemic wasn't going to stop us – and, as ever, they reflect the talent that exists across our sector.

Congratulations to our winners, and thank you to every one of you for the part you play.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "John Gill". The script is fluid and cursive.

John Gill, editor, *Times Higher Education*

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# University of the Year

## University of Glasgow

This year, the Black Lives Matter movement has been a rallying cry for action to end enduring racial inequality.

To play their part, universities must confront both their role in perpetuating race-based disadvantage and, in many cases, their history as institutions that profited directly or indirectly from the slave trade.

The University of Glasgow took decisive action as long ago as 2016 to commission a study to explore its relationship with slavery, and the publication of the resulting report in September 2018 was accompanied by a pledge to spend £20 million in reparations, establishing a Glasgow-Caribbean Centre for Development Research with the University of the West Indies, scholarships for ethnic minority students, and a far-reaching programme of research collaboration focused on the Global South.

Glasgow's actions have not only led the way for the sector – the university is now advising many others – but also stand the institution in far better stead to answer the challenges that Black Lives Matter pose.

Moreover, they have fundamentally repositioned the institution, putting issues such as decolonising the curriculum at the heart of its next strategic plan, and setting a high bar for future action demanded on challenges such as the university's environmental impact.

The judges hailed Glasgow as a “hugely deserving” University of the Year.

“At a time when universities are too often on the back foot in public debates about value and relevance, Glasgow stood out as a shining example of what a university should be: institutions of courage and action, uniquely placed to tackle the biggest issues facing the world,” they said.

“By taking a moral position and leading the way in facing up to the legacy of slavery and making amends, it has set the bar high both for itself and for all universities.”

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### Stuart Bannerman, Director of International at London South Bank University

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# Business School of the Year

## Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University

In the past year, Aberdeen Business School has ramped up its already strong commitment to work-based and work-related learning, enhancing the provision at undergraduate level and expanding it to postgraduate courses.

The result has been an increase in the number of international students, a new funding stream and more diversity within the student body.

In 2018-19, 71.4 per cent of full-time undergraduate students in the school undertook a 12-month paid placement, which enhances both student experience and graduate employability. Recognising the benefits of this, the school developed an extended master's route, which offers students the opportunity to embed an optional 12-month placement into their degree.

Aberdeen Business School also developed a predominantly online graduate apprenticeship, in business management, funded by Skills Development Scotland. This supports the upskilling

and reskilling of professionals and workforces for the changing working environment by providing accessible work-based learning opportunities.

In 2019, the school successfully bid to run a pilot graduate apprenticeship in accountancy. This is developed in conjunction with two professional bodies, allowing students to complete an honours degree and their chosen professional accounting qualification while remaining in full-time employment over five years, rather than the usual seven.

The judges said the school has shown an "enormous commitment to work-based learning at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, which resulted in a substantial increase in international students. This has also borne fruit in the form of excellent results in the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey and the National Student Survey. Special congratulations are due for the great work staff have done on apprenticeships."

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# International Collaboration of the Year

## Swansea University, in collaboration with UK and international partners

An initiative aimed at expanding access to electricity in rural India using third-generation solar technology was the winning entry in this category.

Sunrise – the Strategic University Network to Revolutionise Indian Solar Energy – united leading solar research teams from the UK and the Global South to demonstrate more affordable solar technologies in Indian villages.

The network, led by Swansea University, initially focused on engineering and physical science but expanded to include social science academics from the UK and India to engage more effectively with local communities. The project even invited a theatre company to hold a workshop to train scientists in arts-based community-engagement methods.

The number of institutions involved grew as well. The initial collaboration was between five UK and five Indian universities and several businesses, but it now includes universities in Mexico, Kazakhstan and South Africa.

As a result of the initiative, the Indian Institute of Science, one of the key partners, developed and installed a solar-powered energy storage system in a village school. The set-up will provide classrooms and computer labs with affordable, reliable and sustainable energy.

The Sunrise network has also broadened the global reach of participants' research and has enabled scholars and staff to develop new skills through training and workshops.

The judges described the Sunrise network as "an outstanding and innovative collaboration. Involving engineering, the physical sciences, art, drama and social policy, it is having a significant impact on capacity development, skills and innovation and is creating new ways of installing affordable and sustainable electricity."

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# Knowledge Exchange/Transfer Initiative of the Year

## University of the West of Scotland

Artificial intelligence is already changing lives, but the University of the West of Scotland has shown that AI can also save lives.

Working with the French electronics giant Thales, the university developed drones that are now being used by the Scottish police to find missing people at night in remote rural areas.

Thanks to its advanced cameras and “deep learning” technology, the drone system can identify specific individuals who appear as a speck in the distance. The technology’s application follows a defence project that sought to help drones identify objects and people using night-vision video equipment to reduce loss of life from “friendly fire”.

As a result of these two projects, the university has built a 20-strong international academic team that has since provided other AI-driven business solutions, such as remote emergency

medicine services for the Republic of Ireland’s National Ambulance Service, smart street-lighting solutions for Romania and the leadership of two 20-partner European projects to develop 5G network management solutions to a value of £13.7 million.

In addition, the university is also leading a £4.6 million European-funded initiative to work with the UK’s National Air Traffic Services on drone-related projects.

The judges applauded how the team had built on successive projects to demonstrate life-saving applications, commending the “growing stature of the academic team and their work to create AI-based business solutions”.

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**November** Exceptional student retention

**December** Any time? Any place? Anyhow? Strategies and practice for delivering quality education in these challenging times.

**January** High impact, low technology blended learning

**February** Gender in higher education

### You can also access benefits from previous topics:

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# Most Innovative Teacher of the Year

## Judith Francois, Kingston University

A lecturer who created tools to build a more inclusive curriculum and develop students' self-efficacy and resilience is the winner of this year's Most Innovative Teacher of the Year award.

Judith Francois, a senior lecturer in clinical leadership in Kingston University's School of Nursing, uses pictorial resources created by artists and storytelling mechanisms to explore cultural understanding and well-being with both undergraduate and postgraduate students. For example, a storytelling workshop aimed at first-year undergraduates allows black and ethnic minority (BAME) students to explore how their backgrounds influenced their experiences and, ultimately, increased their sense of belonging.

Her reflection toolkit trains personal tutors to run sessions that are led by students, allowing them to step into leadership roles and practise decision-making. This has been incorporated

into the development of a bespoke leadership programme for ethnic minority NHS staff aimed at reducing the paucity of nurses from these backgrounds in management positions.

The judges said they were "highly impressed" by Ms Francois' work to build resilience and self-efficacy for her students, "which is so critical at this time".

"Her undergraduate and postgraduate work transcends cultural differences, creating an inclusive environment in which students can flourish," they said. "Her reach and her creativity demonstrably extend beyond higher education, with her reflection toolkit to support BAME leadership development, which has been taken up for use in the NHS."

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# Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

## University of Worcester

Our judges hailed the University of Worcester's "whole institutional" approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

The institution says its work aims to examine "the way in which each activity and facility promotes inclusion and participation while simultaneously contributing to educational excellence".

From being named the UK's number one university for fair gender pay, with women represented equally across the whole university from lower pay grades to the very top, to running a 12-month transgender education and support programme, Worcester has endeavoured to create a truly inclusive culture.

Among other examples of its commitment and effort are its stipulation that every residential room built by the university in the 21st century include a wheelchair turning circle, its 2019 award for "loo of the year" for its on-campus, wholly community-accessible Changing Places toilet, not to mention the fact that just over 10 per cent of its student body have a declared disability.

The judges were impressed with "the university's sustained, whole institutional approach to EDI, which places students at the centre". They also noted Worcester's recognition of its own part in changing the narrative about the value society places on certain roles.

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# Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community

## University of Manchester

The University of Manchester's bid to ensure that the construction of its new engineering campus had a "life-changing impact" on a disadvantaged area of the city has landed it the award for Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community.

The development of Manchester's £400 million engineering campus, close to inner-city Ardwick, sought to set a new benchmark in UK higher education for social value creation through the generation of local jobs, apprenticeships and cash grants.

After a community consultation in Ardwick and the selection of a contractor, Balfour Beatty, on metrics including social value criteria, the university set targets for the project that resulted in the delivery of 182 jobs and apprenticeships in the area, 15 of which were for former prisoners.

The development also delivered £60,000 of support to local community groups, including renovating a women's refuge and establishing a food bank.

In total, the campus project delivered £19.7 million of social value for local communities, setting a record for construction programmes to date in UK higher education. Staff and students from across the university worked together with Balfour Beatty, Manchester City Council and The Works, an employment initiative run by Greater Manchester's Growth Company.

"This is an outstanding example of an ambitious project that is clearly located in the present but looks to the future through the creation of jobs and apprenticeships, providing extensive support to local community groups while making exemplary use of social value metrics," the judges said. "It also involves not only the contractors but also staff and students within the university, thus delivering real engagement with the local community as well as long-term value."

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**Outstanding Entrepreneurial University**



# Outstanding Entrepreneurial University

## Aston University

Aston University's "strategic" and "inclusive" cross-institutional approach to supporting businesses, the West Midlands region and student entrepreneurship impressed the judges in this category.

Aston Enterprise – the university's flagship student start-up support body – enhanced its offering with the creation of Apollo, a new six-week mini-accelerator. The programme inspires entrepreneurs to develop business ideas through interactive masterclasses taught by business leaders. Seventy students participated, and 18 businesses were created as a result.

Meanwhile, Aston's Centre for Growth celebrated five years of delivering practical business support to entrepreneurs with its most successful year to date. Thanks to cutting-edge research, first-class teaching and effective partnerships, the centre's programmes have supported more than 1,000 entrepreneurs, established 210 new businesses, created 650 jobs and increased revenues by £120 million.

Aston Medical School opened to its first undergraduates in September 2018, with features including an innovative health leadership module delivered in conjunction with Aston Business School. This enables graduates to develop the entrepreneurial skills needed to run the business elements of a GP surgery.

April 2019 marked the launch of Building Business Leaders of the Future, a programme addressing the lack of leadership and management education targeted at ethnic minority-owned businesses, with 22 entrepreneurs participating in the first cohort.

In total, 35 businesses were created by Aston students and recent graduates during the 2018-19 academic year.

The judges praised Aston's "excellent inclusive approach to enterprise and entrepreneurship", saying it had "demonstrated a strategic approach with students at the heart".

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A photograph showing the lower half of several people sitting on a set of wide, grey stone steps. They are wearing various styles of trousers and shoes, including jeans, dark trousers, and sneakers. The image is cropped to focus on the legs and feet.

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# Outstanding Estates Strategy

## University of Birmingham

A landmark campus renovation initiative undertaken by the estates team at the University of Birmingham impressed our judges with the “broad range of projects” involved and the way they created major benefits for the local economy and the community.

The projects, which the university says constitute the biggest renewal of its estate since the institution’s establishment in 1900, included a new conference centre, a sports club, almost 5 hectares of parkland and an extension to the business school.

Our judges highlighted the team’s approach to collaboration, education and training, including skills workshops for more than 500 local children, 10 apprenticeships, 70 weeks of work experience, 10 new jobs to local people and 205 weeks of on-site training.

The team also developed its own procurement framework to create a more efficient and cost-effective route to working with business, and they have made the scheme available to others in the higher education sector.

Environmental credentials were also notable. The team achieved a 20 per cent cut in carbon dioxide emissions four years ahead of target and a 10 per cent reduction in water consumption.

“Balancing the delivery of a number of capital build projects with the creation of a significant public realm project has seen major improvements in the estate, thus supporting the university’s objective to deliver a world-class university experience,” the judges said.

“Positive engagement with industry [has] allowed the integration of best practice from outside the HE sector to become embedded within the estates department.”

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# Outstanding Library Team

## University of Edinburgh

The University of Edinburgh's uCreate Makerspace is a site where the digital and physical worlds meet and blend.

It is here that digital data and visualisations take on physical form, and material objects are transposed into the digital world. Student societies, student entrepreneurs and teaching staff can all visit the site and make use of 3D printers, various electronic components and an ever-expanding array of new and transformative technologies, including virtual and augmented reality.

Unlike similar initiatives in other institutions, uCreate Makerspace is located within the university library, not in a science or engineering facility, so it sits at the heart of the whole academic community. This enables it to bring people from across all 21 of the university's schools into dialogue with STEM staff. Furthermore, it puts a strong focus on students and takes direction from users, which should ensure that it remains a "young" space positioned at the cutting edge.

In the short term, uCreate Makerspace is playing a key role in supporting the shift to the "hybrid model" of teaching required during the pandemic. Yet it has also helped to jump-start careers in new technologies, as in the case of a group of students who went into business to create affordable 3D-printed prosthetic arms. Other outputs have included archaeological replicas, astrophysics maps and biological models illustrating everything from insects to human organs.

The judges praised "the systematic planning, from initial vision, the comprehensive one-year pilot service and, ultimately, the successful and much-expanded roll-out. There is clear evidence of an improvement in teaching and learning."



# Outstanding Marketing/ Communications Team

## Staffordshire University

Staffordshire University's new approach to clearing, which led to a huge increase in the number of mature students at the institution, was the standout entry in this category.

The university developed clearing-specific messaging, a bold new creative style and an aspirational video campaign to increase student numbers and strengthen Staffordshire's status as "the UK's foremost digital university" among prospective applicants.

A revamp of its clearing microsite centred on its online offer calculator, supported by a clear call to action: "Get an instant decision online." It also integrated new live-chat functionality to supplement its traditional clearing hotline.

Meanwhile, a hyper-targeted social marketing strategy was designed to promote all clearing courses while minimising crossover and, in turn, wasted spend.

As a result, Staffordshire recorded a 50 per cent jump in the use of its offer calculator, a 15 per cent increase in hotline calls and a 63 per cent rise in the number of placed mature students. In total, 918 new students were accepted through clearing last year at a cost per acquisition of £272. The university says these students represent potential revenue of £25 million over the subsequent three-year period.

Overall, these achievements were accompanied by a 30 per cent year-on-year rise in offers, a 49 per cent increase in new undergraduates and an 85 per cent jump in overall applications.

The judges said the initiative was "a 'best in class' example of a successful clearing campaign utilising a well-coordinated blend of media, marketing and communications activities" that was generating "a significant positive impact on the institution as a whole".

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# Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

**Tara Moore, Ulster University**

There was no shortage of inspiring individuals in this year's shortlist for Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year, but Tara Moore's nomination still stood out.

In her 18-year academic career, Professor Moore, who is professor of personalised medicine at Ulster University, has supervised more than 90 postgraduate research students as first supervisor (including MD, DSc and PhD candidates).

Bolstered by her efforts, Professor Moore's students have won prestigious postdoctoral positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University and Duke University, among others, while one developed a coronavirus test that has been delivered to tens of thousands of people during the pandemic.

Professor Moore has supervised many "distant" PhD students based outside the university on clinical attachments or work-based industrial placements, with a large number of them in different countries or studying part-time.

As a mother of seven, Professor Moore always seeks to help candidates achieve a happy work-study-life balance despite the pressures inherent in the pursuit of a PhD. Nonetheless, her students have filed numerous patents, co-authored papers in leading journals, won prizes, spoken at numerous research conferences, and also visited her Belfast laboratory to teach.


Professor Moore also leads Northern Ireland's first industrial PhD academy, a £5 million project that will create up to 50 additional funded PhD studentships.

"Professor Moore is held in equally high esteem by supervisees past and present and by her colleagues," explained our judges, adding that she "used her international academic reputation, empathy and immense personal energy to help students complete their degrees and fulfil their potential".

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# Outstanding Support for Students

## Nottingham Trent University

At a time of much-needed reappraisal of women's and ethnic minorities' rights, Nottingham Trent University sought to stand in solidarity with such movements by raising the agenda of harassment, hate crime and violence against women across its campuses and beyond.

With the goal of encouraging reporting and collaborative action, the university's respect and consent working group reviewed data around such issues and aided in the creation of a specialist team that included new posts such as a sexual violence project officer, a hate crime project officer and a network of sexual violence liaison officers. In 2018-19, this was supplemented by the roll-out of a much-improved programme that delivered a zero-tolerance sexual violence policy, a film on that theme that was shared in classes and on social media, workshops on consent and bystander intervention, a sexual violence awareness week and a student signposting guide.


Training has been delivered to more than 1,100 staff and students, while the increased profile and the open-door policy engendered by the programme has resulted in a large increase in disclosures of instances of harassment, hate crime and violence against women – from 20 in 2015-16 to 141 in 2018-19, with all those who make such reports now receiving appropriate and timely support.

“Support for students in an increasingly complex higher education environment has never been more important, and the...work at NTU in responding to and preventing sexual violence stood out because of its close integration with the students' union, the breadth of interventions developed...and the scale of the programme, reaching thousands of students and staff across the university,” the judges said.

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# Outstanding Technician of the Year

## John Waters, University of Liverpool

UK universities are rightly asked to uphold the very highest standards when using animals for scientific research. But few individuals have done as much to instil a culture of care for laboratory animals on campus as John Waters, chief animal technician at the University of Liverpool.

As animal care and welfare officer, Mr Waters is responsible for a variety of wild and laboratory rodents at the Henry Wellcome Laboratory of Mammalian Behaviour and Evolution. His expertise has been crucial in developing new methods for replacing the anxiety-inducing tail-handling method that was routinely used in labs across the world.

These more humane methods of animal handling are now being shared widely, in part thanks to workshops and training courses run by Mr Waters in the UK and internationally. His care for fellow animal technicians is also well known

– he has co-authored a number of training resources to help show other technicians how they can make a difference.

Mr Waters' activities helped him to win election to the council of the Institute of Animal Technology, where he has led many initiatives to support animal technicians since 2018.

Our judges described Mr Waters as a “sterling example of an outstanding technician”.

“Over a career of 30 years, John Waters has made an enormous contribution to animal technology, developing and disseminating best practice in animal welfare and supporting and advocating the roles of animal technicians across the UK and beyond,” they said. “The impact he has made throughout his career – locally, nationally and internationally – is undeniable.”

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Technician Commitment

# Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

## Royal Holloway, University of London

Cambodia is in the midst of a construction boom that is pushing its capital, Phnom Penh, upwards. Yet such economic progress has been deeply reliant on tens of thousands of adults and children trapped in debt bondage – one of today's most prevalent forms of slavery – and compelled to mould and fire clay for building materials in extremely hazardous conditions.

For its Blood Bricks project, Royal Holloway, University of London put together a team of British and Cambodian researchers who revealed for the first time how climate change is a key driver of this modern form of slavery. Families are forced to leave their rural homes to live near and work in brick kilns to repay the loans, which they were forced to seek because climate change has adversely affected their crops. These interconnected challenges can be addressed effectively only alongside each other.

Royal Holloway's research led to a graphic report and a photographic exhibition at London's Building Centre, which attracted international

media attention. The work also prompted a number of other interventions designed to call attention to abuses and to improve conditions on the ground.

The judges were "overwhelmingly impressed" by the Blood Bricks project as "a commendable example of skilled, interventionist research" that told "clearly and effectively" the "sobering stories" of those trapped in debt bondage. It had also "found excellent ways of publicising its findings and means by which to draw political attention to them, including high-profile transnational media reporting and governmental briefings. Its impacts include pending legal action in the United Nations, and material made available locally for wage negotiations, legislative change and action on child labour."



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# Research Project of the Year: STEM

## Heriot-Watt University

Sustainable development can sometimes feel like an exercise in abstract targets whose real-world benefits may be difficult to communicate to the public. However, the invention created by the winners of this year's STEM Research Project of the Year offers a shining example of how universities can fuel change.

After years of research into the traditional materials used in the construction industry – which globally accounts for about 40 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions – the team at Heriot-Watt University came up with a sustainable alternative to clay bricks.

The K-Briq, 90 per cent of which is made from building-site waste, produces just a 10th of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of a traditional fired brick, has double the insulation properties and uses less than a 10th of the energy in manufacture, which takes a mere two to three minutes, as opposed to up to 40 hours for its clay cousin.

The project has gained worldwide attention, with coverage ranging from the BBC's *The One Show* to CNBC in the US and the business magazine *Forbes*. Patents have already been obtained in the US and the UK, while a spin-off company is looking at a production volume of 3 million K-Briqs a year by the end of 2020. It also has a flagship project next year – the bricks will be used in the building of the new Serpentine Pavilion in London.

The judges lauded the “important contribution” that the project had made to sustainable construction worldwide.

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# Technological or Digital Innovation of the Year

## University of Exeter

At a time when the climate emergency and Covid-19 travel restrictions prevent students from accessing many international destinations, academics at the University of Exeter have developed technology that provides virtual field trips to almost anywhere in the world.

The Interactive Virtual Environments for Teaching and Assessment (InVEnTA) software, which uses 3D visualisation and gaming techniques to recreate environments from Africa to the Arctic Circle, was created by three senior lecturers in physical geography – Steven Palmer, Damien Mansell and Anne Le Brocq.

The software takes in information from sources including drones and handheld cameras, as well as existing datasets, to recreate environments virtually. When students and researchers are on a virtual field trip, they can walk up to signposts that launch multimedia content, while location-triggered ambient sounds help to create an immersive experience.

Lecturers first employed the tool to recreate the Russell Glacier on the west of the Greenland Ice Sheet. More recent applications have included explorations of coastal erosion in the UK and undergraduate archaeology courses.

A second mode allows students to create a virtual environment themselves, giving them the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned.

There are plans to make the tool more widely available to other educators across the UK.

The judges said that among “an excellent set of submissions”, InVEnTA stood out “because of its potential to extend the classroom into a virtual world”.

# Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative of the Year

## Royal Northern College of Music

Through its RNCM Engage programme, the Royal Northern College of Music has played a key role in delivering the joys of music to a wide range of people in the Greater Manchester area and beyond, irrespective of age or background.

As the number of young people studying music at both GCSE and A level has declined steadily and as funding for community projects has fallen sharply, Engage has given young musicians new opportunities to develop their skills – particularly those who might not ordinarily have access to quality tutorship.

In 2018-19, the programme became more focused than ever, with new pathways laid out for under-represented groups such as those from low-income families, areas of low arts engagement and people of ethnic minority backgrounds. That year, Engage ran 227 projects for schools and community groups, reaching an estimated 150,440 young people across Greater Manchester and 62,249 from wider community groups.

The projects included “first contact” operations, which targeted those without previous access to live music, as well as music classes and subsequent guidance on studying at university, in addition to well-being projects in care homes, prisons and hospitals.

The judges declared Engage a “worthy winner”, pointing out that its commitment to taking specialist musical knowledge to a broader cross-section of the community was impressive because not only did it form “a response to the decline in music education and practice in schools, but it also extended the experience of staff and students at the college by incorporating elements of the project into degree programmes. This will ensure that the benefits for the community and the college are sustained into the future.”



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# THE DataPoints Merit Award

## University of Surrey

The Covid-19 pandemic has severely tested societies across the world, with the central challenges boiling down to steering a course between two often competing impacts: securing public health and preserving the economy.

Universities are, of course, a key cog in the response to these challenges, and not just in terms of medical research to mitigate the disease. Institutions are a vital part of the public health response in their localities and will help to drive recovery through their links with local economies and communities.

Through the use of data that inform *Times Higher Education's* Impact Rankings – which assess universities' contributions to meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – we tried to assess which institutions may have been in the best position to meet these twin challenges.

A score was calculated from non-research metrics in two of the areas considered by the rankings: SDG 3 (“good health and well-being”) and SDG 8 (“decent work and economic growth”).

These metrics include performance on outreach collaborations in public health, the training of the health workforce, employment security and the general provision of work placements.

A shortlist containing an eclectic mix of universities from a wide geographical area resulted from the analysis, from research-intensives such as Queen's University Belfast and the University of Leeds to teaching-focused institutions such as London South Bank University and the University of Worcester.

Overall, however, the University of Surrey – ranked ninth in the world on SDG 8 and 40th in SDG 3 – came out on top with an impressive performance across the broad range of metrics considered, especially on health outreach and secure contracts.

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# THE Outstanding Achievement Award

## Admissions teams, UK higher education

In this year of exceptional circumstances, we at *Times Higher Education* thought long and hard about how this award could recognise the staggering efforts and achievements of the entire higher education sector.

This was a year characterised less by individual brilliance – although there has been plenty of that – than by collective achievement, as every part of the university was mobilised to respond to an unprecedented crisis.

So, we decided to break from tradition and to present this year's award to a group whose heroic efforts in late summer reflect the wider efforts and endeavours across our institutions.

Admissions officers found themselves facing a crisis within a crisis when, in late August, the decision to award A-level results on the basis of a flawed algorithm caused a national outcry.

As the political furore grew, a series of changes led ultimately to a government U-turn, and a switch to teacher-predicted grades. The result was the most chaotic admissions cycle imaginable.

The professionalism with which admissions teams responded is testament not only to the teams themselves, but also to the exceptional dedication and specialist expertise that exists across universities' professional services, which play a vital role in the delivery of world-class research and teaching.

If this does not always get the recognition it deserves, then this award aims to put that right.

It also reflects the fact that the outstanding work that has gone into maintaining UK higher education excellence during this year's crisis has touched every part of our universities.