



**Awards
2025**

Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Alastair Owens, <i>Queen Mary University of London</i>
Submission title or project name	
Nominee / key personnel	Professor Alastair Owens, School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London
URL	
Submission	Alastair Owens has made a distinctive contribution to doctoral provision at Queen Mary University of London by securing numerous UK Research and Innovation-funded collaborative studentships – where projects are conceived with and co-supervised by non-academic organisations. Through competitive bids to Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council schemes, he has won funding for 15 collaborative doctoral awards (CDAs) (10 as principal investigator, five as co-investigator: probably more than any humanities scholar in the UK, worth more than £1.3 million in UKRI funding to Queen Mary), including two new CDAs starting in October 2025. These form the bulk of the PhDs he has supervised: 15 to successful completion, five in progress, two to commence in the autumn. Professor Owens has become expert at supporting students in balancing the need to research and write a thesis with opportunities for gaining professional experience and development in non-academic settings, securing research impact, and engaging with the public.



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Institution Name	Stephen Gibson, <i>Heriot-Watt University</i>
Submission title or project name	The PhD Whisperer
Nominee / key personnel	Professor Stephen Gibson
URL	
Submission	Stephen Gibson has built a stellar reputation across multiple institutions as an authentic, inclusive, talented supervisor who changes lives through his work. Known colloquially as “the PhD whisperer”, his ground-up leadership has made a measurable impact on both people and purpose at Heriot-Watt University. His core areas of impact are direct supervision, leading and mentoring teams of supervisors, leading the development of the School of Social Science’s postgraduate research (PGR) programmes and Doctoral Centre – measurably improving PGR satisfaction – and well-being. He most recently ascended to the position of associate executive dean for research and impact. It is Professor Gibson’s perennial sense of possibility, teamwork, professionalism and inclusion that set his work apart.



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Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Lars Chittka, <i>Queen Mary University of London</i>
Submission title or project name	Nomination of Prof Lars Chittka for the category of Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year
Nominee / key personnel	Professor Lars Chittka
URL	https://chittkalab.sbcs.qmul.ac.uk/Team.html
Submission	Over 23 years at Queen Mary University of London, Lars Chittka has trained 28 PhD students, with two more in progress. Many were from developing countries or minority backgrounds, and 18 were female. Several now hold prestigious academic positions, including full professorships at UCL, the University of Arizona, the University of Würzburg, Jiangnan University and elsewhere. Notable alumni include Professors Fei Peng (head of department, Southern Medical University), Anna Dornhaus (University of Arizona) and Elli Leadbeater (UCL, winner of two European Research Council grants). Recent graduates are postdocs at top institutions including Sorbonne University, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Sheffield. Students such as Alice Bridges and Samadi Galpayage have won international awards. Professor Chittka focuses on fostering intellectual independence, encouraging students to design their own research rather than following predefined projects. This approach, diverging from typical UK training models, prepares students to become future research leaders. Many former mentees remain in academia, achieving significant success, which Professor Chittka considers the best indicator of effective PhD mentoring.



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Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Michael Sweet, <i>University of Derby</i>
Submission title or project name	From coral reefs to global reach: the mentorship journey of Professor Michael Sweet
Nominee / key personnel	
URL	
Submission	When Michael Sweet joined the University of Derby in 2013, he brought a deep passion for mentoring the next generation of scientists. He has supervised nine PhDs and three MPhils to completion, with 15 more under way. His former students now lead in global conservation, consultancy, research and aquaria, co-founding initiatives such as the Coral Spawning Lab and the Olive Ridley Project. But it's not just about academic outcomes. Professor Sweet invests personally in every student – broadening their skills, building confidence and opening doors through his global network. He has created an international postgraduate exchange programme with partners from Brazil to Saudi Arabia, and helped launch a £20,000 SeaLife Trust scholarship to support innovative marine biology projects. Now, with the launch of a new fellowship on the horizon, he's scaling that impact even further – driving bold, cross-disciplinary research that doesn't just shape careers, but helps shape the future of our planet.



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Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Qammer H Abbasi, <i>University of Glasgow</i>
Submission title or project name	
Nominee / key personnel	Professor Qammer H. Abbasi
URL	
Submission	Qammer Abbasi is an outstanding research supervisor whose innovative and inclusive approach has transformed STEM mentoring. He has guided more than 50 students and postdocs from diverse backgrounds, including those from conflict-affected regions, empowering them to excel in academia and industry. His pioneering “How to Supervise Your Supervisor” workshops and open-door policy foster a supportive, student-led research-culture, enabling his students to thrive in research and secure prestigious positions. Professor Abbasi’s mentorship has led to award-winning student research recognised by IEEE, URSI and SPIE, and has inspired valuable industry partnerships. Recognised through the University Teaching Excellence Award 2022 and the University Research Supervisor Award 2023, and as policy adviser to the UK government’s Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and a member of the Scottish Science Advisory Council, he aligns his students’ research with national priorities, delivering real-world impact.



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Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Andy Clarke, <i>University of Lancashire</i>
Submission title or project name	Dr Andy Clarke
Nominee / key personnel	Dr Andy Clarke (senior lecturer, School of Business)
URL	
Submission	Andy Clarke is an exceptional research supervisor known for his inclusive, innovative and student-centred approach. He has supported more than 16 doctoral candidates in the past five years, helping them publish in top journals, present internationally and move into high-impact roles in academia, industry and government. His pioneering initiatives – such as structured peer review and concept map assessments – have strengthened research quality and communication skills across his institution. Beyond academic supervision, Dr Clarke is deeply committed to student well-being, offering sustained support through personal and professional challenges. He actively helps students access funding, develop their careers and build lasting research networks. His guidance continues beyond graduation, with many former students crediting his mentorship for their ongoing success. Dr Clarke's dedication, creativity and care make him a standout figure in doctoral education.



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Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Ursula Hurley, <i>University of Salford</i>
Submission title or project name	Professor Ursula Hurley, professor of life writing, University of Salford
Nominee / key personnel	Professor Ursula Hurley, professor of life writing, University of Salford
URL	https://salford-repository.worktribe.com/person/1158277/ursula-hurley/outputs?page=1&Organisation=School+of+Arts%2C+Media+and+Creative+Technologies
Submission	Ursula Hurley is an outstanding research supervisor known for her unique approach to enabling challenging or unconventional PhD projects. Her groundbreaking application of practice-based research is constantly redefining what a PhD can be. Professor Hurley challenges the traditional academic norms of the PhD through creative methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches, resulting in uniquely structured projects that require significantly more involvement on her part than the conventional PhD format. She treats the PhD as a literary genre – something to be evolved, questioned and disrupted – and has successfully supervised 14 PhDs to completion, with a further 12 under supervision. Professor Hurley is bound by a mission to “subvert the PhD from the inside”. This has led to pioneering work in decolonising research, with Professor Hurley supporting students to incorporate indigenous knowledge, non-standard English and experimental formats into their theses. She has helped students from under-represented backgrounds to achieve extraordinary outcomes.



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Outstanding Research Supervisor of the Year

Institution Name	Josie Barnard, <i>De Montfort University</i>
Submission title or project name	Research Supervisor of the Year
Nominee / key personnel	Dr Josie Barnard (associate professor of creative and digital practice)
URL	
Submission	As creative writing research evolves to include interviews with audiences, influencers and industry practitioners – particularly in fast-moving digital fields such as podcasting and social media – ethical approval has become essential. Without it, research students can't gather the data that make their work cutting-edge and impactful. However, most institutions lack the expertise to support this kind of research. Josie Barnard is a rare exception: her in-depth understanding of ethical processes has enabled De Montfort University to support innovative, socially relevant PhDs that other universities have turned away, giving the university a clear USP in an emerging area of doctoral study.