

THE Awards Outstanding Entrepreneurial University

Shortlisted entries

Winner – Outstanding Entrepreneurial University

Aston University

Carolyn Keenan, BSEEN Project Manager at Aston University talks about how the university is committed to nurturing entrepreneurship.

What makes you an entrepreneurial university?

Aston University is a place where entrepreneurship thrives. Our commitment to nurturing entrepreneurs is engrained in our culture and evident through the extensive range of practical, innovative entrepreneurial programmes taking place across the University. Most importantly it is written into our strategy so receives the full commitment from the University executive. The Aston 2018-2023 strategy defines key entrepreneurial outcomes for our beneficiary groups:

“Students will be highly skilled in their discipline and have a global and entrepreneurial mindset”. For business; “We will link businesses, the professions and other organisations to graduate employees and entrepreneurs”, and for our region and society; “Our research, innovation and enterprise activities will enhance the economy and improve quality of life in the West Midlands and beyond.”

Aston lives and breathes this strategy through its practical ethos, the vibrant enterprising nature of its student body, entrepreneurial business networks and its deep connection to the region.

Aston Enterprise, the University’s flagship student start-up support body, has a mission to help curious students explore, experiment and launch new ideas. Being entrepreneurial doesn’t just mean starting up a business. It means being an opportunity spotter, a creative problem solver and a passionate doer. Aston Enterprise provides a jam-packed calendar of events, programmes, interactive workshops, competitions and business challenges to help students develop these important skills. This is whether they are looking to learn more about self-employment, startup a business or develop the enterprising skills needed to have impact of their career and on the world around them. We focus on giving real-life insights from entrepreneurial people in diverse industries, opportunities to work with other engaged students to learn in a practical way and to encourage students to think differently.

Birmingham is a young and diverse city which is reflected in the student and staff community at Aston. The popular 'How to' series of events including sessions on How to start a food, fashion, tech business and social enterprise, feature fireside chats with a wide range of relatable but aspirational role models who run their own ventures.

Aston Enterprise enhanced its offering in 2018/19 with the creation of Apollo, a new 6-week mini accelerator. The programme inspires entrepreneurs to develop business ideas through a mix of interactive masterclasses, lessons from real-life guest entrepreneurs, practical group learning supported by mentors from the business community. It has helped fill the ideation gap between students developing an enterprising mindset and actually starting their business. Over 100 students participated and 18 businesses were created as a result.

The award winning BSEEN, a student and graduate startup support programme led by Aston in collaboration with other Birmingham based universities, is now in its eighth year. On average 35 businesses are created by Aston's students and recent graduates each academic year.

- Chukwudi Ononye took part in Apollo in 2018, launched his business with the support of BSEEN during the September 2019 boot camp and received an Enterprise bursary. His meal-prep service Chefiesta provided free meals to frontline NHS teams during the height of the pandemic.
- Danielle Roberts founded her platform Unlimited You that provides accessible workouts for disabled people by disabled people, with the support of BSEEN in 2018. She recently won the judges prize and some seed funding in the Santander Entrepreneurship Awards.

What would winning Outstanding Entrepreneurial University mean to you?

Winning the Outstanding Entrepreneurial University of the year award would celebrate all that Aston has achieved in this field by working in partnership with both internal and external organisations. It would enable us to deepen these existing partnerships and be a springboard to create new ones. It is also a fantastic opportunity to showcase our entrepreneurs and enable them to gain well deserved recognition for their achievements and their support for Aston.

Find out more about [enterprise activity](#) at Aston University

Shortlisted

Royal Agricultural University

What makes you an entrepreneurial university?

Through our [School of Business and Entrepreneurship](#) and our award-winning [Enterprise Programme](#) the Royal Agricultural University (RAU) fosters an entrepreneurial mindset among our students.

The University's Enterprise Programme provides a supportive environment for students to develop their enterprise skills and business ideas via its Think, Try, Launch, Grow framework of support. The Programme has been supporting students for over 13 years to get involved with enterprise to explore and develop their business ideas. In addition, the University provides access to two live student-led social enterprises Cotswold Hills wine and Muddy Wellies beer, both stocked widely in retail outlets including 87 Mid-Counties Co-Op and 3 Waitrose stores in Gloucestershire. Proceeds from these social enterprises also contribute to the proof of concept funding available to students wanting to test their ideas.

Our School of Business and Entrepreneurship (SBE) offers research informed and practice-led university education, supporting our students to become business leaders, who are capable of developing the rural economy. Whether they aspire to a successful career in business or agri-business or, dream of starting their own company we provide support to help make it a reality.

SBE offers a curriculum that is grounded in the values, beliefs and ethics of the rural economy, unlike many other business schools. This rural economy today includes a diverse range of ventures from environmental innovators to high technology companies, artisan and craft businesses (producing gin, niche beers, rape seed oil varieties, cultural heritage products in small quantities) and agricultural businesses. Many are family businesses, most are run as for profit - businesses and increasingly social enterprises.

Our degree programmes focus on Agri-food Business, International Business Management and Rural Entrepreneurship.

In 2019 the RAU was recognised as a Centre of Excellence by the Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs (IOEE) and awarded the title of Enterprising Learning Provider of the Year at the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (SFEDI) and IOEE awards.

What would winning Outstanding Entrepreneurial University mean to you?

Dr David Bozward, Head of the School of Business and Entrepreneurship, said:

“To win THE Awards Outstanding Entrepreneurial University of the year would be an incredible achievement and acknowledgement of our development as an entrepreneurial university which has required great support and co-ordination from many stakeholders within the university over many years. For the hard work and dedication from both staff and students to be recognised at a national level would be outstanding, especially for a small specialist university in a landscape of larger institutions.”

Shortlisted

Robert Gordon University

What makes you an Entrepreneurial University?

At the heart of Robert Gordon University’s (RGU) culture beats ambition and innovation, encouraging its staff, students, and alumni to be resourceful innovators by empowering them with innovative mechanisms to enhance skills, develop new products and inject the economy with new services.

Embedded across RGU’s curriculum are opportunities for aspiring innovators to access the resources, experience and skills required to grow their business ideas and flourish as the next generation of entrepreneurs. Resources like RGU’s Startup Accelerator, the first funded programme of its kind in the North East of Scotland, supporting successful applicants of students, staff, and alumni with business mentoring, seed funding, and exposure to additional funding opportunities.

RGU is also the first university to achieve Scottish Innovative Student Award Scheme accreditation from the Scottish Institute for Enterprise, allowing us to deliver additional entrepreneurial courses and equip students with a forward-thinking and enterprising mindset.

The university runs free, extra-curricular training sessions and workshops across on a range of innovation and entrepreneurial subjects, and works with the libraries to extend its entrepreneurial ecosystem out with its own walls and into the region. Promoting greater innovation in the economy is built into our university strategy, using our resources, students, staff and expertise to work with other organisations to boost the economy through new businesses, services, and jobs.

What would winning Outstanding Entrepreneurial University mean to you?

Winning this award would signal to university stakeholders, our students and staff that our vision and values are celebrated for making a difference – to people, businesses, education, and the economy. It would honour RGU’s core values and the aspirations of higher education that develop individuals to succeed in their studies, grow as individuals, and prepare them to make a positive contribution to society and its economy.

With innovation and entrepreneurship being identified as a necessary foundation of economic growth, the award would endorse the creation of new and ongoing work at Robert Gordon University to drive innovative and entrepreneurial practices among students, staff, alumni, and the wider community. RGU recognises the value of this pursuit to both staff and students – as learners, workers, consumers, family members and contributors to the wider community.

Finally, winning the award would be a recognition of the passion, commitment, and leadership demonstrated, not only by numerous staff and students across the institution but from our entrepreneurial community – our start-up teams, our mentors, our speakers. It will provide an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the journey to date so that we can better serve the entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

Find out more about [enterprise activity](#) at RGU

Shortlisted University of East London

Dr Paul Marshall, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Careers and Enterprise at the University of East London, talks about how entrepreneurship now sits at the heart of the university's ambition.

What makes you an entrepreneurial university?

Under our Vision 2028 strategy, the University has stepped back from the way in which it was operating previously and rebuilt from the ground up a holistic set of activities that will enable us to meet our Industry 4.0 goals, with entrepreneurship sitting at the heart of that ambition.

We literally ripped up the curriculum of every single degree programme in the University and rewrote them so they are specifically directed towards the needs of employers and the 4th industrial revolution. We also integrated into the new curricula our [Professional Fitness & Mental Wealth](#) modules, which are there to support the student on that entrepreneurial journey towards their future employment.

This starts from the moment the student arrives at the University of East London by building a set of identified skills and competencies. As a result, every single student in the University – whether they're studying nursing or fine art – is on a clear pathway that will develop not just enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, but also the soft skills needs of future employers. It also builds students' mental resilience so that they can overcome the challenges that they will face when they set up their own business or seek to drive change within existing

industries. Like with a stick of rock, entrepreneurship skills run through everything that we do.

Beyond this core we've made sure that all of the other integrated parts of the University drive towards this same goal, such as our research activity, which is very much focused towards business and industry.

We work directly with businesses both in terms of preparing students for future jobs and using our facilities to drive changes within these industries. This includes conducting live projects, showcase businesses' activities and testing them with our faculty, students and members of our community.

We also work on new-product generation, with our students and businesses working together on solutions to future problems. And finally we've established partnerships with leading universities internationally, particularly Tongji University in Shanghai. In this case we've connected what's going on within our university – and the neighbouring Royal Docks Enterprise Zone and Newham – with a partner in Shanghai that has similar ambitions and is located in a very similar environment.

What would winning Outstanding Entrepreneurial University mean to you?

This award would be a tremendous recognition of the change the University of East London has gone through, the speed of that change and the scale of our ambition.

We are building on our heritage – delivering higher-level skills in response to the second industrial revolution – to equip our students for the future world of work in the fourth industrial revolution. The changes we have made have already had a genuine impact.

Winning this award would also be recognition of the need for change in how we skill the entrepreneurs and workforce of tomorrow, within the community, the UK and globally. These changes affect us all.

Find out more about [enterprise activity](#) at the University of East London.

Shortlisted

Teesside University

Professor Jane Turner, OBE DL, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Enterprise and Business Engagement), Teesside University talks about how the university is passionately committed to excellence, and improving lives and life chances.

What makes Teesside an Entrepreneurial University?

For Teesside, it's all about the people, because it's the people at Teesside who make us what we are and enable us to do what we do. We're the archetypal institutional anchor, rooted in our region and passionately committed to excellence and improving lives and life chances. Our mission reflects this, defining and driving our thinking and behaviours. It's central to our teaching, research, student experience and external engagement, and it's demonstrated through a collaborative mindset that looks to create opportunity for the institution, its region, and all who live, work and study here. Being entrepreneurial is the hallmark of our anchor role, and our single-minded commitment to making a real difference.

From students and alumni to front-line staff, to our governing body and everyone in between, our ethos is defined by our people: their initiative and new ideas, partnership working, collective ambition for our students, the institution and its region, a focus on doing things well and striving to do them better, and a real spirit of adventure. Put all that together with an exciting mission and an enabling infrastructure, and you have an organisation that's going places, knows it and is very energised by that.

For students and graduates: Our vibrant enterprise ecosystem is sustained by Launchpad, a unique and well-established start-up programme working with academic Schools and business to provide a stimulating environment and tailored support for pre-starts, start-ups and students. The many digital companies we've launched form the heart of an exciting digital cluster in the region, in turn actively engaging with the curriculum through lectures, projects and placements.

Our Microbiz Academy, led by our Business School, takes young entrepreneurs through a 16-week programme to help them develop a business idea whilst studying at Teesside. Through 4 key stages from idea to profitable business operation, it offers industry-led workshops, access to marketing and business knowledge, all in the company of a personal BizBuddy.

Real-life commercial experience through programmes such as large-scale internships, a Business Clinic for external clients, and games studio teams working with games publishers,

all play their part in giving our students that mix of understanding, initiative and innovation that are so crucial to career success.

For our staff: An environment that actively encourages collaboration across disciplines in teaching, research and enterprise, is underpinned by proactive development programmes and a career progression pathway in enterprise and KE. We recently launched Teesside EDGE, an exciting cross-School addition to our enterprise portfolio aiming to grow entrepreneurial leadership in our staff community.

For our wider community: We're very much outward-facing, delivering no fewer than 11 strategic business initiatives to embed innovation and skills, and to bring business perspectives back into teaching and research. They include DigitalCity, a longstanding programme to grow the tech sector, and Grow Tees Valley, which works with SMEs to help them develop new products and processes. Our Customer First accreditation is testament to our ability to respond to business and stakeholder needs.

Teesside's new University Enterprise Zone (UEZ), covering the entire campus, and beginning operation in 2021, embodies our approach: entrepreneurialism is part and parcel of everything we do. We'll be using our UEZ to build on success, help our region face down its economic challenges, and give our students everything they need for a successful, entrepreneurial future.

What would winning Outstanding Entrepreneurial University mean to you?

We know we've got the right entrepreneurial approach; our track record shows this and with the ambitious plans we have for our entrepreneurial future, we know where we are going and nothing's going to stop us. But winning would mean a huge amount to Teesside staff, students and alumni, and our wider community.

This recognition would send an enormously strong message about our work and its impact, nationally and internationally. It would reinforce what makes us different, and what makes us such a great institution to work, study and partner with. Finally, and most importantly, it would inspire us to aim still higher, further legitimise who we are and what we do, giving an enormous confidence boost to all who work and study here, as well as to our partners and our region, where there is such a strong ethos of joint working, and such a strong sense of pride in our collective achievements.

To win Outstanding Entrepreneurial University would absolutely be the icing on the cake.

[Find out](#) more about enterprise activity at Teesside University.

Shortlisted

University College, London

What makes UCL an entrepreneurial university?

Nurturing an entrepreneurial culture across the university

Being entrepreneurial matters to UCL and is at the heart of its mission. Its natural predisposition to 'disruptive thinking' and a recent drive to embed the frameworks and support needed to enable innovative behaviours in its students and academics, has meant UCL's entrepreneurial community is now thriving.

Over the last few years, UCL has been steadily delivering a culture of change around innovation and enterprise, making it easier for our students and academics to engage in entrepreneurial activity. For example, the capabilities that help UCL's community engage in innovation and enterprise have been brought together as one under UCL Innovation & Enterprise. This includes the funding of ideas, helping build innovative business partnerships, commercialising technologies, supporting those undertaking consultancy and nurturing how to think and grow as an entrepreneur. Having these skills together as one group, rather than fragmented, has created a comprehensive offer for UCL's students and academics interested in becoming more entrepreneurial.

UCL recognises the importance of this area through a dedicated Vice-Provost (Enterprise) who promotes and embeds a holistic approach to innovation and enterprise across UCL.

Supporting our students to develop an entrepreneurial mindset

It is increasingly important for all our students to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, irrespective of discipline, to help steer their careers in an ever-changing world. One of the ways UCL is helping to do this is at Base KX, where we are building a thriving centre for entrepreneurship. Here we boost the entrepreneurial mindset and employability skills of our students, create new enterprises, forge new alumni and business links, and contribute to the growth of the local economy. Our extra-curricular entrepreneurship programmes are launching high growth potential firms into the start-up ecosystem and are attracting attention from investor networks and corporate accelerators who are seeking access to new ideas, businesses, and entrepreneurial people.

The HEBCI figures for 2018/19 show that UCL's graduate startup companies had a significant impact, employing 1,673 people and attracting £60m of external investment, with three UCL startups currently taking part in Y Combinator, one of the world's most prestigious startup accelerators.

Other ways UCL students are supported to develop an entrepreneurial mindset is by applying research to real world problems. For example, through UCL Computer Science's Industry Exchange Programme, over a thousand UCL students work with businesses, charities and SMEs to help solve complex challenges.

There is also a focus on our doctoral students, where a new entrepreneurship training specifically for this group was launched, recognising that only a small proportion of doctoral graduates will become professors in academia.

Expertise in supporting academics to create and grow companies

UCL has had four spinout companies that have IPOed (listed via an initial public offering) in under four years, and last year, for the very first time, UCL spinouts attracted more external investment than those of any other UK university (£579m in 2018/19). This is a good reflection of the quality of UCL technologies and research, as well as the university's expertise in supporting its academics to turn their knowledge and ideas into a reality.

UCL has also grown its support for social enterprise and express licensing, which recently facilitated the rapid response to the pandemic through partnerships like the UCL Venture breathing aid, between UCL and Mercedes-AMG.

What would winning Outstanding Entrepreneurial University mean to you?

Winning the award would be a tremendous honour, particularly in a year that has highlighted the importance of universities working collaboratively to translate their knowledge and know-how into practical applications for the benefit of society. It would be a ringing endorsement of UCL's entrepreneurial community, and a great impetus for future progress.

Find out more about [UCL's entrepreneurial activity](#)