Bhattacharyya Award 2026
SMEs only strand guidance notes

Deadline: 7 July 2026

Contents

Introduction

The Bhattacharyya Award celebrates outstanding collaboration between universities and industry. Each year a prize of £25,000 is awarded to a partnership that demonstrates how academia and industry can work together to address complex challenges and deliver real-world impact.

Established in 2019 in tribute to Lord Kumar Bhattacharyya, the award highlights collaborations that demonstrate how strategic partnerships between universities and industry can accelerate innovation and benefit society.

Launched in 2026, the SME Strand recognises impactful collaborations between universities and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

This strand celebrates collaborations that demonstrate how university partnerships can help SMEs develop technologies, scale innovation and create economic and societal impact.

The prize for this strand is £25,000.

Eligibility

The Bhattacharyya Award is open to all UK universities and colleges.

Each university may submit:
- One application to the Industry Strand
- One application to the SME Strand

Submissions may be in any discipline. This award is open to submissions which demonstrate exceptional collaborations between academia and SMEs from all disciplines

and not only those within the Academy's engineering and technology remit. The purpose of this award is to celebrate the very best of academia-industry collaboration as a whole and submissions are encouraged from the social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, medical sciences and biological sciences.

Cross-University and Sector-Based Collaborations
Submissions may be multidisciplinary or have a more general theme. Cross-university collaborations are eligible, provided they involve genuine, substantive partnerships between institutions. However, at least one industry partner is required for any collaboration.

Criteria
SME Definition

For this strand an SME is defined using the UK Government definition:
- Fewer than 250 employees
- Annual turnover of £50 million or less, or balance sheet total of £43 million or less
- Independent business and not a subsidiary of a large parent company

Duration of Collaboration
The collaboration should demonstrate at least two years of sustained engagement.

Examples may include but not limited to:
- Collaborative research and development
- Joint technology development
- Knowledge transfer partnerships
- Product development programmes
- Strategic innovation partnerships

Strategic Engagement
The collaboration should demonstrate meaningful partnership between the SME and the university, such as:
- Shared decision-making on research or innovation
- Regular collaboration through meetings or milestones
- Co-created outputs such as prototypes, intellectual property, products or policy contributions

Partnership Structure
The collaboration must include a UK university or college and one or more SME partners.

How to apply
All submissions must be submitted via the Academy's online grants management system, available at https://grants.raeng.org.uk. If not already registered, applicants must first register with the online system and provide some basic login details to create a profile.

Submissions should be made by the Head of Institution or an appropriate delegate such as a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research or Innovation of the UK University.

A submission consists of the following information:

Submission contact- This should be the head of institution or an appropriate delegate.

Name and contact details of the lead collaborators from SME and academia

Basic details about the collaboration- This includes the collaboration start date and a 10-word title of the submission.

Narrative submission (not more than 10 A4 pages)
This should provide a description of the collaboration; it may include images and/or graphics to illustrate its nature and its effect. The structure of the submission is not prescribed but it should clearly demonstrate, with evidence, how the work meets the criteria for the award.

Assessment process

The assessment panel consists of academics and industrial representatives and will include representatives from outside the Academy's engineering remit should an application from another discipline be received. The Judging Panel will use the above criteria to assess all submissions and shortlist up to 5 finalists.

Finalists will be required to produce a 3-minute video showcasing how their collaboration meets the criteria for the award. See key dates below for an indicative timeline.

Finalists will be awarded £5,000 which can be used to cover the video production costs or any worthwhile activities that help to further develop the collaboration.

The Judging Panel will assess the video submissions to determine the winner of the Bhattacharyya Award.

Finalists will be invited to an event in spring 2027 where the winner of the award will be announced.

Assessment Criteria

The Judging Panel will assess submissions based on but not limited to:

1. Sustained and Strategic Collaboration

The collaboration should normally have lasted at least two years, be active at the point of submission, and demonstrate engagement beyond a single project or transactional activity.

The panel will look for evidence of:

- A genuine partnership between the university and SME
- Ongoing collaboration across projects, innovation activities, or knowledge exchange
- Clear roles and meaningful contributions from both partners
- Evidence that the collaboration has developed and matured over time

Applications may involve multiple academic teams or departments, reflecting a broader institutional partnership.

2. Exceptional Collaboration

Applicants should demonstrate why the collaboration is exceptional and deserving of national recognition.

The panel will consider:

- The strength and depth of the partnership
- The ambition and significance of the work undertaken
- Evidence that the collaboration has delivered notable outcomes or achievements

The panel will consider excellence relative to the context and scale of the SME partner.

3. Originality and Distinctiveness

The panel will assess how the collaboration demonstrates innovation or originality.

This may include:

- Development of new technologies, methods, products or services
- A distinctive approach to collaboration or knowledge exchange
- Addressing a challenging or emerging problem in a novel way

4. Benefit to the Partners

Applications should demonstrate how the collaboration has strengthened both the SME and the academic institution.

The panel will consider evidence such as:

- New capabilities, knowledge or skills developed
- Commercialisation or product development
- Growth, scaling, or new opportunities created through the partnership
- Strengthened research or innovation capacity within the university

5. Impact on UK Society or the Economy

The collaboration should demonstrate clear impact or potential impact.

This may include:

- Economic growth or job creation
- Technological advancement
- Regional or sectoral development
- Environmental or societal benefits

Impact may be regional, sector-specific, or focused, but should show meaningful outcomes resulting from the collaboration.

Resubmission
Submissions which have previously been unsuccessful are eligible to reapply. Resubmissions will be considered as a new submission and, if shortlisted, a new video would need to be produced.

Use of the shortlist and prize money

Finalists will be required to provide short statements on the intended use of the shortlist prize money and how the prize of £25,000 would be used should the collaboration be successful. These statements do not form part of the assessment process.

Please note that the shortlist prize of £5,000 and the main prize of £25,000 are awarded to the university in support of the video creation and as a grant for knowledge transfer activities to further develop the collaboration, respectively. As such, prizes are to be awarded on the basis that they would not constitute a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022, with the university being responsible for ensuring compliance with respect to the use of funds awarded.

Use of AI

1. Taking Responsibility for Content: The submission author(s) are fully responsible for all the content presented in their submission. The submission process does not penalise the use of generative AI tools, but it is imperative to ensure that the submission reflects the voice and ideas of the author(s)[1].
2. Partial Use of AI Tools: It is not acceptable to solely rely on generative AI tools to write the entire submission from start to finish. While these tools may be used to assist in various aspects, the submission must primarily represent the work of the author(s).
3. Proper Acknowledgement of AI Usage: The submission author(s) must provide clear acknowledgement if they have used generative AI tools in the process of writing their submission. This includes disclosing the name of the tool used and describing how it was utilized. The following style should be employed for referencing[2]:

I acknowledge the use of [insert AI system(s), version number and link] to generate materials for background research, styling, proofreading, etc.

I acknowledge the use of [insert AI system(s), version number and link] to generate materials that were included within my final assessment in modified form.

4. Declaration within GMS: This will include a statement that all contributions have been appropriately referenced or credited including the use of any machine intelligence tools used in developing the submission.

Confidentiality

The Academy's website is secure. Your submission will not be visible to others.

All material submitted for the Bhattacharyya Award is treated as confidential and will not be disclosed to anybody beyond the Judging Panel and the secretariat involved in the evaluation process.

Only shortlisted submissions will be publicly disclosed.

---

[1] For applicants whose first language is not English, machine translation may be used, but care should still be taken to ensure the accuracy of this translation, especially for technical vocabulary.
[2] If the applicant's home institution has an alternative preferred style, they should in general use the Academy's or seek permission in advance for variation.

Key dates

31 March 2026
Applications open

⬇

7 July 2026, 4pm
Submission deadline

⬇

September 2026
Shortlist decisions communicated

⬇

September 2026- January 2027
Production of a 3-minute video by finalist

⬇

1 December 2026
Submission of videos by finalists

⬇

Spring 2027
Announcement of winner/event

Contact

For any queries, please contact Awards team at awards@raeng.org.uk