



**CDN COLLEGE  
AWARDS 2026**

# **AWARDS PROSPECTUS**

#CollegeAwards

# WELCOME >

**The College Awards 2026, proudly delivered by CDN, are now officially open for entries.**

The awards celebrate the talent, skills, and achievements of colleges, their staff, and learners, providing a valuable opportunity to showcase excellence, innovation, and impact across the sector.

This year marks the 27th anniversary of the College Awards. Over nearly three decades, the awards have highlighted the profound difference colleges make to learners, communities, and the wider economy, showcasing the vital role they play in shaping a brighter future for Scotland.

This is **#YourCDN** — supporting every college, every staff member, every step of the way.

As #YourCDN, we are proud to support, champion, and showcase colleges and the outstanding work happening every day. We look forward to celebrating excellence across the sector through the College Awards 2026.

## **NEW FOR 2026!**

In response to feedback, we've reviewed and refreshed the award categories to make them even stronger, clearer, and more impactful for submissions.

- The Inclusive College and Health & Wellbeing Awards have been combined into a single, powerful category: the Thriving Together Award, celebrating colleges that create inclusive, supportive environments where learners and staff can thrive.
- The Showcasing Colleges Award has been created to truly highlight the breadth of college achievements. This now embeds the former Marketing and Communications Award, allowing colleges to demonstrate how they promote their successes, engage communities, and share the impact of their work within one high-profile category.
- We are also delighted to introduce a brand-new category: the Student-Led Initiative Award, recognising outstanding student-led projects or initiatives that demonstrate leadership, creativity, and impact.

These updates, along with small tweaks to existing categories, ensure that every submission can showcase meaningful outcomes and sector impact.

# AWARD CATEGORIES >

Below is the full list of 2026 categories, highlighting updates and tweaks (also detailed in each entry guideline):

## CHANGEMAKERS AWARD

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## COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

(formerly College Community Learning Award)

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## DIGITAL LEARNING AWARD

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## EMPLOYABILITY IN ACTION AWARD

(formerly Employer Connections Award)

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## LEARNING AND TEACHING AWARD

(formerly Skills Development Award; now includes additional factors)

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## LECTURER OF THE YEAR AWARD

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## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COLLEAGUE OF THE YEAR AWARD

## RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AWARD

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## SHOWCASING COLLEGES AWARDS

(formerly Marketing and Communications Award; now includes additional factors)

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## STUDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

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## STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE AWARD

(new for 2026!)

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## SUSTAINABILITY ACTION AWARD

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## THRIVING TOGETHER AWARD



# AWARDS DATES >

Entries for the College Awards 2026 must be submitted by 5PM on **Wednesday 24 June 2026**.

## AWARD PRESENTATIONS

The awards ceremony will take place at the Radisson Blu in Glasgow on **Thursday 3 December 2026**, where we are delighted to welcome back the wonderful Amy Irons as our Master of Ceremonies. Mark your calendars for this prestigious event!

We look forward to receiving your entries and wish you every success.



# ENTRY GUIDELINES >

## Guidelines for Completing Entries

1. Entries must relate to an activity which took place in the academic year 2025-26.
2. Entries must be tailored to an individual category.
3. All entries must be signed off by the college Principal.
4. A project/nominee can only be submitted once.
5. A maximum of two entries per category per college will be accepted.
6. Collaboration is encouraged – multiple colleges can enter together for a project, but only one trophy will be awarded. For entries from multiple colleges, one college should be nominated as the lead college and the entry signed off by the Principal of that college.
7. We welcome entries from Student Associations but these should still be signed off by the college Principal and will count as part of the two entries per college per category.
8. Please state if entry has won any previous Awards; stating date and name of Awards.
9. All supporting evidence must be included within the word count. Any links to documents or images must also fall within the word count, and no additional documents will be accepted.
10. Entries must be completed using the online Awards Entry Form and submitted via email. An email receipt will be issued for each entry received.

## Judging

- All entries will be considered by an independent panel of judges; the Judges' decision is final.
- CDN staff will not be involved in any decisions regarding the judging or the shortlist.
- Shortlist announced by CDN: September 2026

# AWARD CATEGORIES >

## CHANGEMAKERS AWARD

The Changemakers Award celebrates a team of college staff who demonstrate innovation, creativity, and boldness in their practice, challenging traditional approaches to delivering college education to create impactful learning experiences and improved student outcomes.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
  - Willingness to experiment with unconventional teaching methods, approaches to student engagement and creative strategies that foster impactful learning.
- Measurable improvements in student engagement, performance, confidence, and overall learning outcomes.
  - A student-centred approach that prioritises student needs, encourages active participation, and supports a collaborative, inclusive learning environment.
  - The integration of multiple disciplines, promoting holistic understanding and designing projects that apply cross-disciplinary knowledge.
  - Ongoing professional development, including sharing innovative methods with colleagues to foster a culture of continuous improvement.



[Download Entry Form for Changemakers Award here](#)



## COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD\*

This award recognises and celebrates the innovative and outstanding work of colleges and their community partners in delivering impactful community-based learning opportunities. It values inclusion, empowerment, lifelong learning, self-determination, and collaboration with learners and communities.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
  - How the college shows a sustained commitment to supporting community-based learning that is lifelong, life-wide, and learner-centred, particularly for learners facing barriers to accessing provision.
  - How the college contributes to community learning through curriculum content, design, and teaching practice.
- How the college creates and supports effective community partnerships with external providers, adding value to the learning offer in local communities.
  - How the college has developed innovative and creative approaches in recruitment and delivery to engage, support, and empower community learners to fulfil their potential.
  - How the college supports community learners to progress their qualifications within a community-supported learning environment.
  - How the college ensures effective transition routes from community to college for learners continuing their journey.
  - What is unique about this work and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form for  
College Community Learning  
Award here**

\*formerly College Community Learning Award



## DIGITAL LEARNING AWARD

This award recognises a college that has implemented innovative and creative approaches to enhance the quality and effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning, teaching, and/or assessment practice.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- Staff and/or student-led creative digital approaches in curriculum design, content, or delivery.
- Scope for ideas to be adapted or transferred to other curricular areas.
- A sustainable plan to ensure the longevity of the project.
- Collaboration with other departments, students, and/or external partners.
- What is unique about this work and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form for Digital Learning Award here**

## EMPLOYABILITY IN ACTION AWARD\*

This award recognises creative and sustained approaches colleges have taken to enhance engagement with employers. Entries should demonstrate clear, positive benefits for employers, stakeholders, staff, and learners, both in college and in the workplace.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- Creative approaches that provide opportunities for learners and staff to engage with employers and/or develop productive partnerships.
- How these approaches have been, or will be, embedded to ensure long-term benefits for learners, employers, and staff.
- Initiatives that strengthen relationships between employers, training, and education, including work experience, placements, or employment opportunities.



- How employers have been central to the planning, design, and delivery of learning, including systemic approaches to embedding employer connections across the department and college.
- Personal and professional development opportunities for college staff through engagement with employers.
- The impact on employers and the college, which may include bespoke training solutions meeting specific business needs.
- What is unique about this initiative, why it stands out, and future aims.



**Download Entry Form  
for Employability in Action  
Award here**

\*formerly Employer Connections Award

## LEARNING AND TEACHING AWARD\*

This award recognises a college that has demonstrated impact through innovative approaches to learning and teaching, supporting students to reach positive outcomes by developing personal, transferable, and career-ready skills. It celebrates colleges that enable learners to articulate, demonstrate, and apply their skills in a variety of contexts, while fostering learner ownership of their development.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- Imaginative approaches to developing core, essential, meta, and career management skills through curriculum development, teaching, projects, interdisciplinary or collaborative learning, events, volunteering, or competitions.
- The potential for these approaches to be adapted or transferred to other curricular areas.



- Alignment of skills development with regional or national skills needs and the employment market, including relevant digital skills for today's employers.
- Methods that encourage learners to take ownership of their skill development, including evidence of the impact on their learning and outcomes.
- What is unique about this approach and why it stands out.

 [Download Entry Form for Learning and Teaching Award here](#)

\*formerly Skills Development Award; now includes additional factors

## LECTURER OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award recognises an individual in a learning and teaching role who has inspired students to achieve their goals and ambitions, even in challenging circumstances, and has made a significant difference within their college.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – through achievements, contributions, or examples showing the difference they have made.
- How this colleague has instilled positive change through their work.
- How they have championed research-informed practices within their department or college.
- How their passion, innovation, and dedication have had an impact on both students and the wider staff body.
- What is unique about their work and why it stands out.

 [Download Entry Form for Lecturer of the Year Award here](#)



## PROFESSIONAL SERVICES COLLEAGUE OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award recognises any support and professional services staff member who has made a significant investment of talent and time, creating a positive impact on others within the college and/or the wider community.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – through achievements, contributions, or examples showing the difference they have made.
- The positive impact the individual has had on colleagues, students, and/or the wider community.
- How the individual's determination and dedication has inspired, challenged, or served as a positive role model to others.
- An insightful and/or creative approach to their work.
- What is unique about their contribution and why it stands out.



[Download Entry Form for Professional Services Colleague of the Year Award here](#)

## RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AWARD

This award recognises projects that demonstrate research and/or innovation within colleges. We invite applications from colleges that have implemented groundbreaking practices in skills development, process redesign, or successful collaborations with businesses, taking ideas from concept to delivery. Entries are also welcomed from colleges whose research projects or enhancement initiatives have led to significant improvements in college offerings, student experience, or partnership working.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- The justification and need for the project, highlighting its significance and potential impact.
- The innovative elements of the project, including the inspiration behind it and how it challenges existing practices.



- The role of research (academic, action research, or a combination), detailing the methods and approaches used.
- The positive impact of the innovation on the college, students, and wider community.
- Effective collaboration with external partners.
- What makes the project unique and the specific outcomes that distinguish it from others.



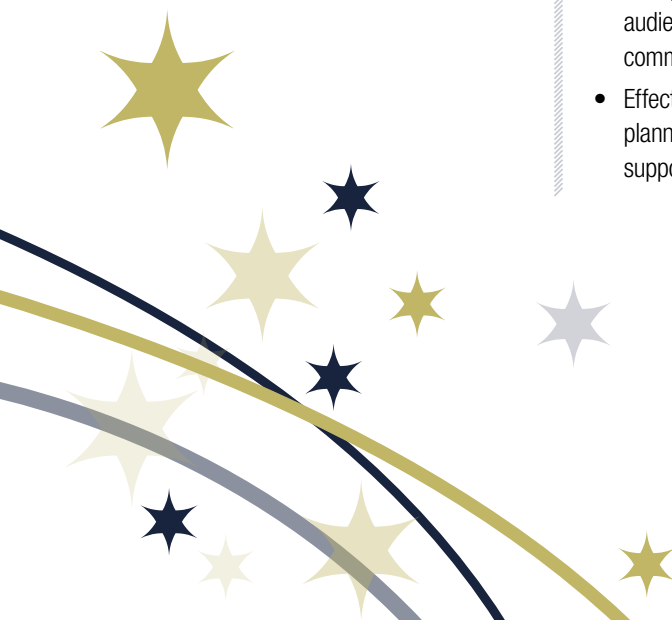
**Download Entry Form for  
Research and Innovation  
Award here**

## SHOWCASING COLLEGES AWARD\*

This award recognises a college that has effectively highlighted its work, achievements, and impact, both within the sector and beyond. It celebrates colleges that inspire others, share best practice, and demonstrate leadership through creative and innovative approaches to presenting their successes.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- How the college promotes and presents its achievements, for example through campaigns, events, case studies, or innovative storytelling.
- Strategic planning and rationale for the approach, including the intended audience and methods used to communicate impact.
- Effective use of resources, including planning, budgeting, and any external support or partnerships.



- Outputs and outcomes achieved, with clear explanation of how results were monitored, measured, and evaluated.
- Sector leadership or external engagement, showing how the college has inspired others, strengthened partnerships, or raised its profile.
- What is unique about this work and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form for Showcasing Colleges Award here**

\*formerly Marketing and Communications Award; now includes additional factors

## STUDENT OF THE YEAR AWARD

This award recognises an individual student who has made an exceptional contribution of talent, time, and effort, creating a positive impact within their college and/or wider community.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – through achievements, contributions, or examples showing the difference they have made.
- The positive impact of the student's contribution on others, in college or the wider community.
- How the student's determination, creativity, or initiative has inspired, motivated, or served as a positive role model.
- An insightful or innovative approach to improvement or problem-solving.
- How the student has developed an idea into a successful venture or outcome.
- What is unique about the student's contribution and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form for Student of the Year Award here**

## STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE AWARD (NEW FOR 2026!)

This award recognises outstanding student-led projects or initiatives that demonstrate leadership, creativity, and impact. It celebrates students who have taken ownership of an idea, project, or activity that has made a positive difference within their college, community, or the wider sector.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- Leadership and initiative – how students have taken ownership of the project and driven it forward.
- Creativity and innovation – how the project demonstrates original thinking or a fresh approach.
- The difference the initiative has made for other students, staff, or the wider community.
- Collaboration – how students engaged with peers, staff, or external partners to achieve outcomes.
- Sustainability and potential for continuation – how the initiative will be maintained or adapted in the future.
- What is unique about this initiative and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form  
for Student-Led Initiative  
Award here**

## SUSTAINABILITY ACTION AWARD

This award celebrates a college that has demonstrated leadership and impact in sustainability. It recognises colleges that have advanced social, environmental, and economic sustainability through initiatives that align with a whole-college approach, whether in the curriculum, campus, culture, or wider community engagement over the past year.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- At least one specific sustainability initiative that has progressed significantly in the past year, detailing ambitions and achievements.
- How this initiative supports sustainability across at least two areas: curriculum, campus, culture, or wider community engagement.
- A whole-institutional commitment to embedding environmental and social sustainability across all areas of college activity.
- What is unique about this initiative and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form  
for Sustainability Action  
Award here**

## THRIVING TOGETHER AWARD\*

This award recognises a college that has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to creating an inclusive, supportive environment where all learners and staff can thrive. It celebrates colleges that integrate health and wellbeing initiatives with equality, diversity, and inclusion strategies, ensuring that everyone can reach their potential and feel a sense of belonging.

### Entries should evidence:

- Demonstrable impact – highlighting measurable results or compelling examples of success.
- A strategic approach to promoting health, wellbeing, and inclusion across the college.
- Initiatives that are proactive, sustainable, and impactful, addressing physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing, while fostering equality, diversity, and inclusion.

- How the college empowers staff and students, helping them fulfil their potential and promoting independence, resilience, motivation, and performance.
- Interventions or initiatives that foster positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and a supportive college culture.
- What is unique about this work and why it stands out.



**Download Entry Form for  
Thriving Together Award here**

\*combining Inclusive and Health & Wellbeing categories



# TOP TIPS

## FOR A WINNING COLLEGE AWARDS ENTRY >

Ready to make your College Awards entry stand out?

These top tips will help you shape a compelling, high-impact submission.

### Hear from a Judge:

Long-standing College Awards Judge Jason Miles-Campbell, Director of Jisc Scotland & Jisc Northern Ireland, shares his top tips for a standout entry.

> [Video link](#)

### Look at Past Shortlists:

Take time to explore past entries and submissions. Check out the 2025 summaries in the Shortlist Summary Booklet.






> [Shortlist Summaries Booklet](#)

### New Resource – Sparks of Ideas & Insights:

Provoking thought, sparking ambition, and igniting possibilities, this resource pairs project examples with five ignition questions per category to help you explore fresh ideas. Find practical tools, creative prompts, and our Ideation Illuminations videos on CDN LearnOnline. View it now on CDN LearnOnline.

> [CDN LearnOnline](#)

### CHECKLIST >

-  Follow the criteria
-  Tell a great story
-  Stick to word count
-  Demonstrate impact
-  Submit by the deadline!



#CollegeAwards