

THE GLOBAL **GUA**  
UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS

**Strategy**  
2026-2028





# Foreword

**The Global Undergraduate Awards (GUA) runs the world's leading pan discipline undergraduate award programme which celebrates outstanding global undergraduate research and innovation.**

We have evolved to enhance this recognition with an Annual Global Summit, where we challenge these pioneering undergraduates to take their undoubted ability forward to address the massive challenges facing Global Society.

Since 2018, all GUA winners have been awarded The Clarkson Gold Medal, named in honour of Thomas Clarkson, the English abolitionist and scholar who, in 1785, won a Latin essay competition at Cambridge University on the question "Is it lawful to enslave another person?" Clarkson's essay — later published as *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1786) — became a foundational text in the movement to abolish the transatlantic slave trade. His courage, intellect, and commitment to justice continue to inspire GUA's mission: recognising young thinkers who use their scholarship to make the world better.

The Global Undergraduate Awards has established its pre eminent position with relatively limited investment and a limited public profile. The GUA has now received strategic support from the Irish Government (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science) that keeps our Annual Global Summit in Dublin for the medium term and provides supporting resources to take the Global Undergraduate Awards to the next level.

We are excited and motivated by the journey ahead.



**Jim Barry**  
Founding Chair

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A young Black man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a black tuxedo jacket, a white dress shirt, and a black bow tie, is smiling warmly at the camera. He is holding a blue award box in his left hand. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

# Who We Are & What We Do

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# Who We Are...

**The Global Undergraduate Awards is the world's leading undergraduate awards programme which recognises top undergraduate work, shares this work with a global audience and connects students across cultures and disciplines.**

Our values are innovation, collaboration, ambition, impartiality and inclusiveness.

We believe in empowering students, helping them to recognise the potential their undergraduate work can have in making real change. We wish to connect the world's brightest students and graduates early in their career to give them the confidence to acknowledge and harness their talents to build a brighter future. Fundamentally, we celebrate the passion and excellence of undergraduate students in their chosen field, and help them to explore how that passion can be deployed in making the world a better place for all.

## Our History

The GUA was founded in 2008 in Dublin, Ireland, where we are based to this day. The initiative was originally named the 'Irish Undergraduate Awards' and was open to undergraduate students from the island of Ireland's then seven universities. In 2012, GUA expanded to accept submissions from every Third Level Institution on the Island of Ireland as well as the top twenty universities in Britain, USA and Canada.

The GUA currently accepts submissions from students in any Institution of Higher Education in the world.



# What We Do...

## Global Awards & Summit

The Annual Award programme accepts top graded course work from students in any global third level institution. In 2025 almost 2,500 submissions were received from students in 348 universities in 99 countries. Papers are accepted in 25 categories that cover the entire academic spectrum and are anonymously assessed by international academic and industry leaders (over 500 in 2025). Winners are announced in September.

The Annual Global Summit is our annual showcase event, providing an unparalleled platform where academic excellence is celebrated and a unique environment is cultivated, connecting top students, academics, sponsors, and businesses from across disciplines, continents, and cultures. This vibrant gathering offers students from around the world the opportunity to immerse themselves in the rich culture of the Island of Ireland and appreciate its esteemed academic heritage.

Spanning three and a half days, the Summit features an array of enriching activities, including presentations by our winners, inspiring keynote speakers and dynamic workshops designed to foster skill development, networking and capacity-building.

The event culminates in a prestigious Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony, where outstanding achievements are formally recognised and celebrated. The Annual Global Summit is more than just an event; it is a celebration of knowledge, innovation, and the global academic community, fostering connections that transcend borders and create lasting impact.

### The Process

- Every year, the GUA coordinates an awards programme for penultimate and final year undergraduate students, as well as students who have graduated within the programme year.
- Entrants can submit their work to one of our 25 categories, which represent the spectrum of academic disciplines.
- This work is then anonymously assessed by a panel of international academics and industry leaders spread across the 25 categories.
- The best 10% of work is shortlisted as Highly Commended, Regional Winners represent the best work in each of our 7 geographical regions and the top submission in each category is deemed the Global Winner and Thomas Clarkson Medal winner.
- All Highly Commended and Regional Winners are invited to the annual Global Summit, and the 25 Global Winners are brought to Dublin for the Summit by the GUA.



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# GUA All-Ireland Awards

**In partnership with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2024 saw the re-introduction of a specific event to recognise GUA's award winning students from universities on the island of Ireland.**

This is a stand-alone event, recognising the outstanding achievements of students studying at universities across the island of Ireland, highlighting the strength of third level education across the island, and its ability to compete with some of the world's leading research institutions. This event not only recognises the exceptional academic contributions of our local scholars but also showcases Ireland's rich cultural and academic heritage. It is a moment of unity and pride, highlighting the impressive work emerging from our vibrant academic community and reinforcing the enduring legacy of the Global Undergraduate Awards.

## The GUA Journal and Online Library

**Following the rigorous judging process, the work of all award recipients is published in our distinguished online academic journal. This dedicated platform showcases the exceptional talent, originality and scholarly rigour of Global Winners, Regional Winners and Highly Commended students alike. The journal stands as a testament to the quality and diversity of submissions received each year and serves as a valuable, openly accessible resource for the global academic community.**



This library acts as a repository of excellence, providing widespread access to innovative research and creative projects. By making these works available online, we ensure that the contributions of our awardees are accessible to a broad audience, fostering further scholarly discussion and inspiring future research and creativity.

# Alumni Network

**Upon receiving their awards, Alumni are welcomed into a global community that fosters ongoing connections and collaboration. This network offers a wealth of opportunities for personal and professional growth, providing a platform for continued engagement with peers and experts from around the world.**

The Alumni network also plays a crucial role in the evolution of the Global Undergraduate Awards. Alumni frequently return as judges and speakers, contributing their insights and expertise to inspire and guide the next generation of scholars. This cyclical support system enriches the Awards programme, creating a dynamic environment where knowledge and experience are continuously shared and expanded.

Moreover, the achievements of our Alumni are a source of immense pride and inspiration. As they advance in their careers and make significant contributions to their fields, they exemplify the transformative power of undergraduate research and creative work. The network's growth is marked by the diverse and impactful paths our Alumni take, from groundbreaking research and entrepreneurial ventures to influential roles in academia, industry and beyond.

They are living proof of the potential that lies in every undergraduate scholar, and their collective success continues to elevate the standards of academic excellence and innovation worldwide.



# GUA in Numbers

Since our Inception we have welcomed...

over  
**3,900**  
Award Recipients

over  
**40,000**  
Submissions

from...  
**100+**  
Countries...

**27.4k+**  
Exceptional Ideas...

...That have  
been **Peer**  
**Reviewed** by

**4k+**

**academic &  
industry  
specialists**

\* Figures taken from Global Undergraduate Awards submission data

# GUA Partners

The Global Undergraduate Awards is proud to collaborate with a network of visionary partners who share our commitment to advancing academic excellence and supporting the next generation of global thinkers and leaders.

Their support strengthens our mission to elevate outstanding undergraduate research, broaden international engagement, and celebrate the achievements of students whose ideas are shaping the future. We are deeply grateful for their continued investment in innovation, education, and the global impact of this programme.



# GUA University Partners





# Vision, Mission & Values

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# Our Vision

The Global Undergraduate Awards aspires to be the pre-eminent global undergraduate award, with Clarkson Medal winners recognised for their positive contribution to Global Society



# Our Mission

To inspire pioneering undergraduate students to achieve their full potential through recognising and awarding their research work

**To deliver an annual global awards programme that recognises the best undergraduate research across all disciplines. Host annual events to celebrate high achieving students with the award of the Clarkson Medals and to inspire them to reach their full potential.**

This recognition serves as a powerful motivator, instilling confidence and a sense of accomplishment in each student, empowering them to pursue their passions with greater vigour and determination.

We aim to foster collaboration and the exchange of ideas, enhancing students' academic and professional growth by celebrating their successes and providing ongoing support to help them realise their full potential.





# Our Values

## Excellence

We demand excellence from our undergraduates. We award the best creativity, innovation and critical analysis. And we, consequently, demand the same of ourselves.

## Inclusivity

We believe in the power of diversity and inclusivity to help address the critical challenges facing global society. We welcome and celebrate students from all backgrounds.

## Integrity

Integrity is at the heart of what we do and we expect the same from our undergraduates. We expect ourselves and others to act with honesty, transparency and to be accountable.

## Collaboration

We believe in the power of collaboration to utilise the benefits of diversity and drive progress and innovation. Our approach aims to create opportunities for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

**Together, these values create a dynamic and supportive environment that empowers students to excel, innovate and make meaningful contributions to their fields and society at large.**



# Strategy

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# Strategic Context

**The Global Undergraduate Awards has grown from its Irish roots to establish itself as the leading pan-disciplinary global undergraduate awards programme. It accepts undergraduate research submissions across the full academic spectrum, spanning 25 distinct academic categories.**

Panels of academic judges assess these papers and identify the Highly Commended awardees, Regional Winners and the 25 Global Winners and ultimate recipients of the Thomas Clarkson gold medals. This distinguished group is then celebrated and challenged at a Global Award Summit held in Dublin every November. The GUA has now reached a level where it regularly receives 2,500+ papers from students in 300+ universities, in over 100 countries. While benefiting from the support of more than 500 supportive and enthusiastic academic judges across 25 academic panels and hosts 150+ award-winning students at the Annual Summit.

The strategy outlined in this document is designed to deliver material growth in the programme over the next three years. Submissions, and their rigorous assessment by expert Judging Panels, remain the cornerstone of the Global Undergraduate Awards. This strategy prioritises initiatives that will drive significant growth in submissions while safeguarding academic quality. To support this expansion, the organisation will build the scale and resilience required to manage and sustain growth effectively. This will necessitate increased investment in organisational capability, operational capacity, processes, funding, and governance. In parallel, the GUA, in partnership with the Irish Government and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, will strengthen and extend engagement with its growing alumni community, enabling the development of new initiatives beyond Ireland.



# Strategic Objectives

# 1

## Grow best-in-class global award programme

### Initiatives:

1. Increase global social engagement to promote awareness
2. Increase the number of annual submissions while maintaining academic standards
3. Continue to enhance the submission judging process
4. Drive an increased number and breadth of partnerships with global universities and academic communities

# 2

## Grow and Expand our Annual Award events

### Initiatives:

1. Increase the scale of the annual award Summit
2. Continue to develop the scope and breadth of the Summit
3. Establish the standalone Irish Award event as the pre-eminent Ireland wide 3rd level award occasion
4. Identify locations and explore potential for additional standalone regional events

# 3

## Enhance engagement and connectivity with alumni

### Initiatives:

1. Increase Alumni engagement with the annual award programme
2. Develop regional Alumni chapters
3. Introduce regional Alumni events and activities
4. Build a community space to support engagement, mentoring and event activity

# Strategic Enablers

## 1

**Maintain the highest standards of governance evolving to match the development needs of the Awards**

### Initiatives:

1. Expand the Main Board and establish appropriate Sub-Committees
2. Expand and refresh the Academic Advisory Board
3. Establish initial international Advisory Boards (in partnership with DFHERIS)
4. Measure our governance against the highest standards in the sector

## 2

**Ensure the Global Undergraduate Awards has the required people, processes and systems to achieve its objectives**

### Initiatives:

1. Review existing organisation resources and structure against strategic objective needs and recruit the required talent
2. Review the existing executive processes and amend, as appropriate, to meet the needs of the strategy
3. Continue the implementation and refinement of the integrated data management system to unify submissions, alumni, judging panels and university partners
4. Establish and resource a dedicated Alumni Network, ensuring integration with existing systems

# 3

## **Develop a comprehensive commercial strategy to deliver a sustainable funding model for the Awards**

### **Initiatives:**

1. Implement a new commercial plan to support the annual event programme and align with the Awards
2. Review, amend and relaunch the university partnership plan tailored to the more challenging 3rd level funding models
3. Develop a strategy to target mission-aligned philanthropists with the potential to support at scale
4. Launch a fundraising programme targeted at alumni, judges and other stakeholders

# 4

## **Invest in the promotion and branding of the Global Undergraduate Awards to support the strategic initiatives**

### **Initiatives:**

1. Revise the overall brand strategy
2. Continue the revitalisation of the social media strategy, generating connections with student stakeholders in anticipation of driving submissions
3. Develop a new public relations plan to develop a broader and deeper set of relevant media contacts and partners
4. Consider new media initiatives to promote the Awards and support the strategy



# Measuring Progress

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# Alignment with Strategic Goals

Each strategic goal and initiative will be linked to measurable outcomes. Progress will be assessed annually to ensure our work remains aligned with the mission, vision and values of the organisation.

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

We will develop a suite of indicators to track both outputs (what we deliver) and outcomes (the impact we achieve). Indicative KPIs include:

- ✓ **Participation & Reach**
  - Number of **student submissions and growth** in year-on-year participation
  - **Diversity of submissions** by country, discipline and institution
  - Expansion of **university partnership agreements**
- ✓ **Quality & Governance**
  - Regular **reviews of governance structures** against sector best practice
  - Implementation of **data management and executive processes** to support scale
  - **Engagement levels** of the Academic and International Advisory Boards
- ✓ **Financial Sustainability**
  - Achievement of **annual fundraising targets**
  - Growth in **multi-year sponsorships and partnerships**
  - Expansion of **philanthropic and alumni** giving programmes
- ✓ **Brand & Recognition**
  - **Media coverage** (national, international, sectoral) and measure brand visibility using Share of Voice (SOV)
  - Digital and social media **engagement metrics**
  - **Growth in brand awareness** among students, academics and global partners
- ✓ **Impact**
  - Alumni **outcomes and career progression** stories
  - **Testimonials and qualitative evidence** of the Awards' influence on student development
  - **Increased recognition of GUA** as the leading undergraduate awards programme globally

