

CDI Careers Education Awards 2026

Notes for Entrants

Closing date for entries is **5pm on Friday 1st May 2026**.

1. INTRODUCTION

The CDI Careers Education Awards were launched in 2026 to recognise the achievements of professionals working in careers education in England. The awards, sponsored by the [Careers & Enterprise Company](#), are linked to the [National Careers Leaders' Conference](#) as a celebration of this key area of career development practice.

These awards are separate to the [UK Career Development Awards](#) which will take place towards the end of the year as part of the [CDI National Conference](#) and recognise the best from across the whole profession within the UK and beyond.

These notes contain information to help you complete your entry form and best support your nomination. It includes an overview of the awards, the criteria used by the judging panel and useful tips to help you prepare your nomination.

We have included the questions on the entry form at the end of this document, so you can see the information you will need to complete your entry.

Please remember:

- All entrants being nominated must be members of the Career Development Institute (including affiliate membership) at the time of entry.
- You can only submit one entry for each year's awards. If you enter multiple categories, the judges reserve the right to choose which category your entries best relate to and will only consider the entry for that category.
- The judges will only consider the evidence included on the entry forms when judging entries.
- No correspondence will be entered into concerning judges' decisions, which are final.
- Names of nominators and nominees and their organisations will be removed from the entry before forwarding to the judging panel to ensure a fair process.

2. WHO CAN BE NOMINATED?

Any CDI member, including student members and affiliate organisations providing careers education in England can be nominated or self-nominate for any of the award categories. The entry form asks for the CDI membership number of the individual or organisation being nominated and **entries that do not state the membership number will be invalid.**

You can find out more about CDI membership here: <https://www.thecdi.net/cdi-membership>.

3. AWARD CATEGORIES

There are three award categories, reflecting key aspects of careers education in England. They recognise people and programmes supporting young people in primary, secondary and special schools, Pupil Referral Units, colleges, sixth forms and training providers:

Careers leadership

This award recognises an institution that demonstrates a strategic and sustainable approach to leadership of careers. It celebrates institutions that have a clear vision for careers aligned with the institution's priorities, with careers provision that results in meaningful, measurable improvements in outcomes for all young people.

Careers education programme

This award recognises schools and colleges that deliver high-impact careers provision for learners, and in particular those who face the greatest barriers. Nominations are encouraged from institutions whose careers provision showcases high-quality design, delivery, inclusion, partnership and measurable outcomes for young people.

Experiences of the workplace

This award recognises institutions that deliver high-quality work-related learning and experiences of the workplace. It celebrates programmes that recognise the need to begin early, with a coherent pathway that gradually deepens learners' understanding of the world of work. Nominations should show how high-quality and innovative work experience provision can prepare every young person for their future.

4. THE JUDGING PROCESS

The judging panel will be comprised of representatives of the CDI, International Centre for Guidance Studies, the Careers & Enterprise Company and an expert from the CDI's [Community of Interest for Careers Education](#) (CoICE).

Entries will be sent to the judging panel with the names and organisations of nominees removed to make the process as fair as possible.

The judges will assess all the entries for the award, using the criteria outlined below and their own knowledge, experience and understanding of the relevant issues. They will choose a winner and a runner-up for each category.

The CDI reserves the right to withhold the award in any given category if the entries do not meet the required standard.

5. JUDGING CRITERIA

The judging panel will only base their decision on the information contained in your entry form. The form has specific word limits so it is important that you evidence the criteria below. The emphasis for all entries is to demonstrate:

- **Impact** for the end client(s) – directly or indirectly.
- That the entry is supported by **evidence**.
- How others from across careers education can **learn from** the nominee.

Judging panels will also look at the degree to which each entry demonstrates:

- Excellent and evidenced **professionalism and best practice**.
- Contribution to the **development of the careers education**.
- Evidence of **inclusive and ethical practice** underpinned by the CDI Code of Ethics.
- **Innovation** – the extent to which the work is new.
- **Sustainable impact** including evidence of ongoing and longer-term benefits.

Additionally, individual awards have an emphasis on specific criteria.

Careers leadership: Judges will be looking for entries that demonstrate sustainable and strategic careers leadership with excellence in one or more of the following characteristics;

- A strategic approach to careers planning
- Embedding careers within the development and improvement planning of the whole institution.
- Clear design and implementation of student careers learning journeys, underpinned by clearly defined and measurable careers-related learning outcomes.
- Adoption a model of careers leadership where responsibility and ownership are shared across senior leaders, curriculum teams and wider staff.
- Careers leadership visible across SLT, governance structures and decision-making at all levels.
- Able to demonstrate effective and ongoing impact evaluation, with clear reporting, accountability and developmental cycles.
- Use of evidence to inform improvement, recognition and celebration milestones for staff and learners.

Careers education programme: Judges will be looking for evidence of how the programme demonstrates excellence or innovation in one or more of the following characteristics;

- Be strategically aligned, evidence-informed, and fully integrated within the whole-setting curriculum.
- Careers learning is planned and sequenced through structured learning journeys mapped to developmental milestones.
- Programmes can be delivered by the institution or by trusted third-party partners.
- Clear intent, strong implementation and measurable impact.
- A clear articulation of expectations of learners and learning outcomes adapted to meet diverse needs, including those with SEND, those at risk of becoming NEET, and other groups requiring targeted support.
- Systems for monitoring, evaluating and evidencing impact, such as using learner voice, progression data, destination outcomes and other measures to understand effectiveness and drive improvement.

Experiences of the workplace: Judges will be looking for evidence of how the programme demonstrates excellence in one or more of the following characteristics;

- Providing early exposure to diverse roles, sectors and employers.
- Support learners to investigate and explore their interests, strengths and future pathways.

- Enable learners to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and behaviours through meaningful encounters, projects, and experiences of work.
- Underpinned by careers-related learning outcomes with structured and equitable opportunities that build confidence, challenge stereotypes, broaden horizons, and develop work-related skills.
- Having well-defined aims linked to learning outcomes.
- Thoughtful design that meets the needs of all learners, especially the most disadvantaged.
- Measuring improvements in knowledge, skills, attitudes, confidence and career readiness.
- Making effective use of resources, creative partnerships or novel approaches to engagement.

6. THE TIMETABLE

30th March	Awards nominations open
1st May	Entries close at 5pm
25th June	The winners and runners up will be announced at the National Careers Leaders' Conference.

7. ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS

The winners will be announced during the [National Careers Leaders' Conference](#) which is being held in-person on **25th June** at the **Eastside Rooms in Birmingham**.

All winners will receive a specially commissioned award, and runners-up will receive a certificate.

8. THE ENTRY FORM

To be nominated, please complete the online entry form before the deadline.

Section 1 – Category options, nominator and nominee details:

- Please select the category you wish to enter. You can only submit one entry for each year's awards. If you enter multiple categories, the judges reserve the right to choose which category the entry best relates to and will only consider the entry for that category.
- Please provide the details of the person completing the nomination and the person, team or organisation being nominated.
- All individuals and organisations being nominated must be CDI members and entries will be invalid if they do not contain their correct membership number.

Section 2 – Description of the entry and evidence

Please provide a summary of the nomination of up to 100 words, and a description of the person or programme being nominated. Your description can be up to 250 words and should be a summary of their approach, activities and outcomes bearing in mind the judging criteria stated in this document.

You then need to provide evidence, of up to 500 words, supporting the nomination.

- It should be written in the light of the judging criteria listed in this document.
- It needs to include the direct or indirect impact on the young people being supported and how others in the profession can learn from the work.

- Evidence may include data, feedback, testimonials or changes that have been made by the clients or the organisation.
- The evidence should consider the lasting impact or legacy of the work.
- It should include evidence from clients, colleagues, partners and stakeholders as relevant.
- Weblinks can be added but must link to a publicly available source.

Section 3 – confirmation statement

Please select that you accept the confirmation statement that;

- The information you are submitting is accurate.
- You understand that the judging panel's decision is final.
- You consent to the information contained in the entry being used by the CDI in relation to the judging, management and promotion of the Careers Education Awards.

9. JUDGES TIPS

We want to encourage as many members as possible to take part in the CDI Careers Education Awards to showcase their amazing work. To help you complete the entry form, we hope you'll find these tips useful. These can be summarised as:

1. Get the balance right

Look carefully at these guidance notes and judging criteria. Then think how to best describe your work in relation to these criteria. How is what you do an example of excellence and different from others in the field? The entry form has word limits to encourage a focus on quality of narrative rather than volume.

2. Impact, impact, impact!

The most impressive applications are those that can evidence impact. Consider who benefited and in what way? Are there any lasting legacies? Be selective in your evidence and consider including both qualitative and quantitative data.

3. Plan carefully

Give yourself plenty of time to complete the entry form and present your information effectively and without repetition. Answer the question accurately, be evaluative and succinct in what you say and make full use of the word limits given. Finally, we will only judge what you have written – do not assume any prior knowledge.

If you require any further information regarding the awards, please contact David Morgan: david.morgan@thecdi.net.

10. ENTRY FORM - INFORMATION REQUIRED

It is recommended that you gather all the information required for the nomination ahead of completing the entry form. The information required is;

- Which category the entry is for.
- Your details as nominator (name, job title, organisation, email address and phone number).
- Details of the person or programme being nominated (name, CDI membership number, job title, organisation, email address and phone number).
- Name to be added to the award should you win.
- A 100-word summary of your entry to be used to promote the entry if shortlisted.
- A 250-word description of the entry including the approach taken, the activities and outcomes from them.
- A 500-word statement covering the evidence supporting the entry.