



Welcome to the inaugural

ecsdn Awards



Contents

Program	.....2
Graduate of the Year	.....3
Outstanding EC Practitioner of the Year	.....4
Researcher of the Year	.....5
Buffet Dinner	.....6
Placement Provider of the Year	.....7
Mentor of the Year	.....8
Early Childhood Advocate of the Year	.....9
Publication of the Year	.....10
Musical Interlude	.....11
Social Impact of the Year	.....12
Best Innovation with Babies of the Year	.....13
Early Childhood Transformation of the Year	.....14
Special Category Awards	.....15 - 18
Words of thanks	.....19 - 21

Program

6pm	Arrival and drinks ceremony
6.30pm	Welcome by special guest compere Michael Rosen and ECSDN Co-chairs Tanya Richardson and Aaron Bradbury Presentation of the first three category awards
7pm	Hot Buffet
8pm	Presentation of four category awards.
8.15pm	Live music interlude
8.30pm	Presentation of the final three category awards. Presentation of the five special category awards.
9pm	Closing of the awards ceremony.
9.10pm	Disco
10:30pm	Carriages

Category 1 - Graduate of the Year

The **Early Childhood Graduate of the Year Award** (sponsored by **Birmingham Newman University**) is designed to shine a light on the rising stars of early childhood field. The award concentrated on shining a light on those recent graduates who have already made an extraordinary impact through exemplary practice and a deep understanding of child development.

Tonight, we celebrate a new professional who embodies excellence, dedication, and a total commitment to the well-being of young children and their families. This award acknowledges their potential to shape the future of early years education and thanks them for their unsurpassed professionalism in these vital early stages of life.

Category one - nominees:

Mitzi Harris
Precious Rogers
Matilda Norton



Birmingham
Newman
University

Graduate of the Year

Sponsored by:
Birmingham Newman
University



Category 2 - Outstanding Early Childhood Practitioner of the Year

The **Practitioner of the Year award** is reserved for those who have reached the highest tiers of professional qualification and practice. Open to those at Level 5 and above, this award recognizes the unique intersection of education, health, and social care. Tonight, we honour a practitioner who embodies excellence, using their expertise to transform early childhood environments into places of wonder and effective learning.

We are here to celebrate more than just professional achievement; we are here to honour a significant human impact. This individual has made a lasting, positive difference in the lives of children and their families, serving as a role model for the entire early childhood community. Please join us in recognizing a professional whose dedication to service and excellence is truly unsurpassed.

Category two - nominees:

Charlotte Wright

Christina Afromoah

Eden Cousens



Category 3 - Researcher of the Year

The third award this evening, **Researcher of the Year** (sponsored by **Bright Horizons**) celebrates the vital bridge between academic inquiry and frontline practice. Open to students, graduates, and academics within the field of Early Childhood Studies, this honour recognizes those who have made a significant contribution to the early childhood sector through the power of research.

Our core objective tonight is to acknowledge the rigorous and ethical scholarship that upholds the highest standards of integrity while expanding our collective knowledge of early childhood care. We are here to celebrate researchers whose work does not sit quietly on a shelf, but instead has the potential to inform national policy, transform professional practice, and - most importantly - enhance the daily lives of young children and their families. Tonight, we honour the thinkers and the innovators who are advancing the future of early childhood education one discovery at a time.

Category three - nominees:

Jessica Kirby

Constance Edwards

Kimberley Hurt

Mitzi Harris



Researcher of the Year

Sponsored by:
Bright Horizons



Buffet Dinner



Main course: meat: Chunky beef chilli con carne – Overnight braised beef with warming spices and beans



Side: Fragrant basmati rice



Vegetarian/Vegan: Vegan chilli con carne – Braised sweet potato and beans with warming spices



Dessert: Apple Pie with Custard

Category 4 - Placement Provider of the Year

This award recognizes the essential role of placement providers in shaping the next generation of early childhood professionals. Open to any setting that has hosted undergraduate students, this category honours those who go beyond standard supervision to provide exceptional support, making a transformative difference in a student's career journey.

The objectives of this award are to celebrate settings that offer truly enriching learning environments, promote best practices in mentorship, and strengthen the vital partnerships between educational institutions and the frontline workforce. By highlighting these outstanding collaborators, we acknowledge the dedication required to prepare competent, confident practitioners for the future of early years care.

Category four - nominees:

Amy Bell - Best Childcare

Annabella Da Silva - Bellinge Community Preschool

Amy Belle and Nikki Best - Best Childcare Leeds

Rachel Landon and Nicky Lewis —Keepers Gate
Forest School



Placement Provider of
the Year

Sponsored by:
Norland



Category 5 -

Mentor of the Year

The **Practitioner of the Year award** is reserved for those who have reached the highest tiers of professional qualification and practice. Open to those at Level 5 and above, this award recognizes the unique intersection of education, health, and social care. Tonight, we honour a practitioner who embodies excellence, using their expertise to transform early childhood environments into places of wonder and effective learning.

We are here to celebrate more than just professional achievement; we are here to honour a significant human impact. This individual has made a lasting, positive difference in the lives of children and their families, serving as a role model for the entire early childhood community. Please join us in recognizing a professional whose dedication to service and excellence is truly unsurpassed.

Category five - nominees:

Charlotte Wright

Christina Afromoah

Eden Cousens



Category 6 - Early Childhood Advocate of the Year

The **Early Childhood Advocate of the Year award** celebrates the powerful voices that champion the early childhood sector and drive meaningful change for the next generation. Open to students, graduates, academics, and university teams, this category recognizes those who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and effectiveness in advocating for any facet of Early Childhood.

Our core objectives are to honour those whose work raises vital public awareness, influences government policy, and fosters widespread support for early childhood education and care. By celebrating these exceptional advocates, we aim to inspire others to take action, ensuring that the needs of young children, their families, and the professionals who support them remain at the very heart of the national conversation.

Category six - nominees:

Aaron Bradbury

Lauren Wadsley



Category 7 -

Publication of the Year

This award category celebrates the power of the written word to transform the landscape of early childhood education and care. Open to students, graduates, academics, and university teams, this honour recognizes publications that significantly enhance our collective knowledge and provide a deeper understanding of the complexities within our field. The objectives of this award category are to acknowledge impactful literature that bridges the gap between research and real-world application, while promoting high-quality, well-researched, and accessible publications. By celebrating work that has the potential to inform national policy and improve frontline practice, we honour the authors who contribute to a more informed, effective, and compassionate community for young children, their families, and the professionals who support them .

Category seven - nominees:

**Dr. Aaron Bradbury, Philippa Thompson
and Ruth Swailes**

Dr. Jackie Musgrave



Musical Interlude

Please join us in welcoming to the stage:

Carys Peterson

and

Ed Hammond



Category 8 -

Social Impact of the Year

This award celebrates the pioneers who see early childhood education not just as a profession, but as a powerful engine for social transformation. Open to students, graduates, and academics alike, this category recognises those who display exemplary practice in the care and education of our youngest children while championing their individual needs.

The award seeks to honour individuals creating meaningful, measurable positive change and to highlight the vital role of early years in tackling social inequalities and fostering community well-being. By celebrating these socially conscious leaders, we aim to inspire the entire sector to look beyond the four walls of their settings and strive for initiatives that create a fairer, more inclusive society for every child and family.

Category seven - nominees:

Playful Green Green Planet Hull Stewards

Emma Roberts

Poppy Phelps

Kay Aaronicks



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
NEW UNIVERSITY
EST. 1991

Social Impact
of the Year

Sponsored by:
Buckinghamshire
New University



Category 9 - Best Innovation/Practice with Babies of the Year

This award celebrates the specialists who dedicate their expertise to the most foundational years of life: the practitioners and researchers working with our youngest children. Open to students, graduates, and academics, this category recognizes those who display exemplary practice in the bespoke care and education of babies. The award honours trailblazers who demonstrate exceptional, innovative approaches to infant development and to highlight models of care that prioritize the unique emotional and physical well-being of the very young. By celebrating those who create optimal, responsive learning environments for infants, we underscore the vital importance of the first thousand days and inspire the field to reach new heights in the quality of care provided to our littlest learners.

Category nine - nominees:

Julie Powell

Dr Mona Sakr

Darcey Robbins

Ferne Spencer



Best innovation / practice with
babies of the year

Sponsored by:
Edge Hill University



Category 10 - Early Childhood Transformation of the Year

This award celebrates the profound power of evolution and the courage it takes to embrace change. Open to students and graduates, this category recognizes those who have undergone or initiated a significant transformation, whether within their own professional journey or the lives of the children and families they serve. Our core objectives are to honour demonstrable, impactful shifts in practice and to champion the vital culture of reflection and continuous improvement that defines our sector at its best. By showcasing these stories of growth—from overcoming personal hurdles to revitalizing entire programs—we aim to prove that positive change is always possible and to inspire others to evolve their own practice in the pursuit of excellence.

Category ten - nominees:

Alicemay Galbraith

Katie Ellis



Special Category Awards

Fellowship Award

About the award:

The **ECSDN Fellowship Award** is a prestigious recognition bestowed by the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network, the primary body representing higher education providers of early childhood degrees in the UK. Unlike the standard category awards (such as "Student of the Year" or "Researcher of the Year"), the Fellowship is a **discretionary honour** given to individuals who have made a significant, sustained contribution to the network's mission or the broader early childhood academic and professional community.

About the winner:

The first of our two **Fellowship awards** goes to a prominent academic and researcher in early childhood studies, currently serving as a Senior Lecturer and Programme Convener at the University of Roehampton, where her work is deeply rooted in the Froebelian tradition. With a keen focus on the professional identity of early years practitioners and the international perspectives of the "pedagogue," she has become a leading voice in advocating for a holistic and rights-based approach to early childhood education. Her significant contribution to the **Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN)** is underscored by her leadership as the current Chair, a role in which she works tirelessly to represent higher education providers and champion the importance of degree-level study in the sector. Through her work with the ECSDN, she has been instrumental in shaping national benchmarks and fostering a collaborative community that bridges the gap between academic research, policy, and high-quality practice for the benefit of the youngest children.

Please join us in congratulating

Sigrid Brogaard Clausen



Special Category Awards

Fellowship Award

About the winner

The second of our **Fellowship awards** goes to an individual distinguished for her contributions to the Early Childhood Sector and is recognized for her extensive contributions to both academia and the professionalization of the sector. Throughout her career, she has been a tireless advocate for high-quality early years provision, focusing on the critical intersection of academic rigor and practical application in the field. Her influence is perhaps most notably felt through her long-standing commitment to the **Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN)**, where she has served in key leadership roles, including as Co-Chair and Treasurer. In these capacities, she has played a pivotal role in shaping the national curriculum, championing the development of the ECSDN Graduate Competencies, and ensuring that early childhood degrees maintain a strong, unified voice in policy discussions. Her work continues to support the next generation of practitioners by bridging the gap between higher education and the essential work performed in settings across the country.

Please join us in congratulating

Helen Perkins



Special Category Awards

Lifetime Achievement Award

About the award:

The **Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN) Lifetime Achievement Award** is one of the most prestigious individual honours bestowed by the Network. It is a "Special Award" reserved for those who have dedicated their entire professional life to the advancement, advocacy, and academic rigor of Early Childhood Studies.

Unlike category-specific awards, this is a discretionary honour given by the ECSDN Executive to recognize a legacy that has fundamentally shaped the sector.

About the winner:

This award honours a transformative leader whose lifelong dedication has bridged the worlds of social work and early childhood education to champion the rights of the most vulnerable children. With a career spanning over 40 years, this individual has been a relentless advocate for professionalizing the early years workforce, serving as the lead author and visionary behind a critical set of national graduate competencies. Through their pioneering work with the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN), they have been instrumental in standardizing high-level practice and ensuring that graduates possess the specialized skills in safeguarding and holistic development needed to lead in the sector.

Their influence extends from the front lines of social care to the highest levels of national policy, where they have advised on major government reviews. A scholar, compassionate mentor, and "changemaker," their legacy is defined by an unwavering commitment to social justice and the belief that every child deserves an advocate who truly understands the power of their earliest years.



Please join us in congratulating

Eunice Lumsden

Special Category Awards

Lifetime Achievement Award

About the winner

The second of our Lifetime Achievement Awards celebrates a trailblazing leader whose career has redefined the intersection of health, inclusion, and early childhood education. Drawing on an extensive background in paediatric nursing and over 30 years in higher education, they have become a preeminent voice for the holistic well-being of the youngest children, particularly those with chronic health conditions.

Within the Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN), they have served in pivotal roles—notably as Vice-Chair for Research and Knowledge Exchange—where they were instrumental in championing student-led research and fostering a national culture of academic publishing. Through their contributions to national competencies and subject benchmarks, they have ensured that practitioners combine academic rigour with clinical empathy. Their legacy is one of profound compassion and scholarship, dedicated to elevating the early years as a vital, interdisciplinary profession.

Please join us in congratulating

Jackie Musgrave



Special Category Awards

Chair Emerita Award

The **ECSDN Chair Emerita Award** is a highly specialized honour, reserved exclusively for the past leaders of our Network. Within the hierarchy of the ECSDN, this is considered one of our three '**Special Awards**,' sitting in esteemed company alongside the **Fellowship** and the **Lifetime Contribution Award**.

Unlike our previous categories, which celebrate specific research or practice, this title is uniquely tied to the governance, stewardship, and institutional evolution of the Network itself. It recognizes an individual who hasn't just worked within our community, but has masterfully guided its growth and protected its future, ensuring that the ECSDN remains the robust, influential voice it is today.

This award is conferred upon a distinguished leader whose stewardship has been foundational to the institutional strength and national influence of the **Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network (ECSDN)**. Throughout their tenure as **Chair**, they provided a steady hand and visionary governance, navigating the Network through a period of significant sector evolution and ensuring its voice remained a robust advocate for higher education in the early years.

Their leadership was characterized by a deep commitment to collaboration, successfully bridging the gap between academic research, policy development, and front-line practice. Beyond their strategic oversight of the Network's evolution, they have been a tireless champion for the professional identity of graduates, playing a vital role in shaping the standards that define excellence in the field today. In honouring them with the title of **Chair Emerita**, we recognize a legacy of integrity, wisdom, and dedicated service that has not only protected the Network's future but has inspired a generation of leaders to follow in their footsteps.

Please join us in congratulating

Philippa Thompson



Thank You

To our sponsors

As we draw the evening to a close...

As we draw this incredible evening to a close, it is time to say the most important words of the night: **thank you**. An event of this scale and significance is never the work of one person; it is a symphony of collaboration.

First, we must acknowledge the generosity of our **Award Sponsors**:



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
NEW UNIVERSITY
EST. 1891

Social Impact of the Year

Buckinghamshire New University



Placement Provider of the Year

Norland



Bright Horizons™

Researcher of the Year

Bright Horizons



Birmingham
Newman
University

Graduate of the Year

Birmingham Newman University



Edge Hill
University

Best Innovation/Practice with Babies of the Year

Edge Hill University

Thank You

To our judges

As we draw the evening to a close...

Our winners tonight were chosen by a dedicated panel of judges. We thank them for their time, their rigorous academic scrutiny, and the difficult task of choosing between such exceptional finalists.

Joanne Josephidou	The Open University
Catriona Rogers	Stranmills University College
Jo Dallal	Roehampton University
Kerrie Lee	Hull University
Francois Peill	Blackpool and Flyde College
Verity Campbell Bar	Plymouth University
Sarah Guscott	University Centre Peterborough
Emma Davis	University College Birmingham
Samantha Hoyes	Lincoln Bishop University
Su Lavercombe	Derby University
Helen Perkins	Academic and Friend of the ECSDN
Helen Simmons	University of Northampton
Natasha Young	University of Wales – Trinity St. David
Deborah Nye	Nottingham Trent University
Emma Twigg	Derby University
Ruth Wills	Liverpool Hope University

Thank You

To our judges and event co-ordinator

Stacey Randall	Anglia Ruskin University
Paula Rush	University of Greater Manchester
Angela Scollan	Middlesex University
Juliette Wilson-Thompson	Manchester Metropolitan University
Eva Mikuska	Portsmouth University
Louise Hannon	University Centre Somerset
Adele Harwood	Doncaster College
Rebecca Digby	Norland
Matthew Northall	Nottingham Trent University

A special word of thanks...



An event this seamless doesn't happen by accident. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our **event organizer extraordinaire, Beverley Walters** and all members of the organising committee. From the smallest detail to the grandest vision, Beverley has been the engine behind this evening's success.



What can we say about our host? To have a champion of language, play, and childhood like **Michael Rosen** guide us through the evening has been a true joy. Michael, thank you for your wit, your warmth, and for being such a powerful voice for the values we hold dear.



Thank You

...for joining us this evening. We are so very grateful for your engagement and your tireless contributions. You are the researchers, the practitioners, and the advocates who turn theory into transformative practice every single day. Your passion is the reason this Network exists, and your dedication to the youngest members of our society gives us all hope for the future. From us, the ECSDN co-chairs, from the executive committee and event organisers, thank you for a wonderful evening, and good night.