



The National Watershot Prize

A national award for academic water research – 2026 guidance

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The water sector is facing generational challenges, from securing our water supplies in response to climate change, population growth and new data centres, to cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas. Solving these challenges requires cutting-edge research and innovation.

The National Watershot Prize is a national, annual award of £25,000 in recognition of the top three most promising early-career researchers, or team of researchers, working on the challenges facing the UK water industry. It is funded by Water UK – the trade association for water companies - and judged by an expert panel using our assessment criteria.

The prize is split between the top three entries:

- 1st place: £15,000
- 2nd and 3rd place: £5,000 each



The prize money is a recognition of your work rather than a grant for further research, though you may choose to spend it on supporting the development of your work in your chosen field.

It is free to enter, open to any discipline, and open to researchers of any nationality studying or working in the UK.

Full eligibility criteria

Who can apply

You can apply if, on the closing date, you are:

- Studying for a master's or a doctorate at a UK university; or
- Within three years of being awarded an undergraduate degree, master's or doctorate from a UK university; or
- In your first postdoctoral or early-career research post, within three years of your doctoral award.

Applicants may be of any nationality with the right to study or work in the UK.

What to submit

- A copy of your research, which can be a published paper, thesis, or a summary of your ongoing research programme
- A copy of your CV (two pages maximum)
- A 500-word covering letter summarising the content of your research
- Proof of study, enrolment or employment.

Applying as a team

- Teams can apply, with one named lead applicant who handles correspondence
- Every member of the team needs to meet the criteria above.



Career breaks

The three-year window is extended to take account of time away from research. If you have taken parental leave, had caring responsibilities, been ill, had a disability-related interruption, or served in the armed forces, tell us on the form and we will extend your eligibility window accordingly. You do not need to provide evidence or explain anything you would rather not.

Who cannot apply

- Water UK members and/or employees. Anyone providing services to the water industry, please highlight this in your application as a potential conflict of interest
- Previous National Watershot Prize winners (for future application rounds). Previous runners-up may apply once more.

If your studentship is co-funded by a water company or its supply chain (an EngD or similar) you are eligible. Just declare the relationship on the form. It is excluded from scoring and will neither help nor hinder you.

Please highlight any potential conflicts of interest in your application. We will manage the conflict if possible and only rule you out if it cannot be managed.

Judging process

Stage	Description
1 st round	Water UK will shortlist applications
2 nd Round	Expert panel will consider shortlisted applications
Prize ceremony	Announcement of winners will take place at a prestigious venue in central London



What your research can be about

Applicants' research needs to have addressed the challenges faced by the UK's water industry, which could include (but is not limited to) one of the topics below:

Securing water supplies	Cleaning up rivers, lakes and seas
Infrastructure design for climate extremes, including flood and drought resilience planning	River flow, hydrology, and impacts on aquatic species and habitats
Domestic and commercial rainwater capture systems	Nature-based water filtration
Greywater reuse and recycling	Emerging pollutants such as PFAS, microplastics, and pharmaceuticals
Water reuse in agriculture or industry	Antimicrobial resistance in water
Uptake of household water reuse technology	Agricultural pollution (pesticides, nutrients, sediments)
Leakage detection and reduction	Detection and monitoring technologies
Uptake and performance of smart metres	Impact of pollutants on aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity
Drought resilience	The design and performance of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
Household and business behavioural change	Reducing pressure on sewer overflows
Asset health mapping	Sewer network monitoring, such as real-time sensing and AI-based blockage prediction
Pipe material and design innovation	



What stage the work needs to be at

- It can be published, submitted or presented elsewhere, but the research must be publicly available
- It must be part of something you have authored (or co-authored if it forms part of a larger project). You must be clear in your application about your contribution to the research project
- It must not breach any confidentiality agreement, intellectual property restriction or institutional policy.

How applications will be assessed

Assessment criteria	Weight	What we are looking for
Research quality	30%	A rigorous method and verifiable evidence
Utility	30%	Research that contributes to cleaning up our rivers, lakes and seas, or securing our water supplies
Originality	30%	A genuinely new angle, approach or contribution
Communication and clarity	10%	The research is explained clearly, including to a non-specialist reader

Key dates

Date	Stage
Thursday 3 rd September at 10:00 am	Application window opens
Monday 2 nd November at 11:59 pm	Application window closes
Monday 9 th November	Shortlisted applications to be contacted and invited to attend ceremony
TBD	Ceremony and prize giving to take place