University of Birmingham

Guidance on Nominations for Honorary Degrees 2024/25

**An honorary degree is the University’s highest honour. We award honorary degrees to eminent individuals who have made an exemplary contribution of regional, national, or international significance to their field.**

**We recognise a diverse range of inspiring individuals from all walks of life, including academia, industry, and the arts.**

**Nominations may be proposed by students, alumni, members of staff, including honorary members of staff, or lay members of the Council of the University.**

An honorary degree is the highest honour the University can bestow on an individual and is normally conferred at one of our Degree Congregations in July or December at which the recipient makes a speech to graduating students and their guests. In conferring the honour, we bring interesting people into the University as a basis for further development of their relationship with the University and to provide an inspiration to graduating students.

The University is a global community. We believe our diversity is a source of strength that underpins the exchange of ideas, innovation and debate at the heart of our academic mission. The University welcomes nominations for honorary degrees for a diverse range of people.

In this environment, freedom of speech is fundamental – the ability of all our members freely to challenge prevailing orthodoxies, query the positions and views of others, and to put forward ideas that may sometimes be radical or dissenting in their formulation, all within an atmosphere of mutual respect.

# Who can be nominated for an honorary degree?

The University recognises those who are particularly eminent in their field and whose work is of regional, national or international significance. Our honorary graduates include a diverse range of inspiring individuals from all walks of life, including science and technology, public service, industry, broadcasting, academia, the arts, commerce, and sport.

A full list of honorary graduates since the year 2000 is available on the Honorary Degrees webpage. Some of our honorary graduates include:

* Baroness Valerie Amos (LLD, 2008)
* Karren Brady (DUniv, 2010)
* Hannah England (DUniv, 2022)
* Professor Jim Al-Khalili (DSc, 2022)
* Sir Peter Lampl CBE (DUniv, 2003)
* Professor David John Lodge CBE (DLitt, 2001)
* Carolyn Sampson (DMus, 2022)
* Meera Syal (DLitt, 2003)
* Dr Justin Varney (MD, 2022)
* Anne Wood (DUniv, 2013)
* Benjamin Zephaniah (DLitt, 2008)

Nominations must demonstrate:

* particular eminence in, and an exemplary contribution of high international, national, or regional significance to, their field, noting that an honorary degree is the highest honour the University can bestow and the recipient normally makes a speech to graduating students and their guests;
* the ways in which the nominee embodies the University’s values: ambitious, innovative, open, collaborative, responsible.

Nominations should also normally demonstrate:

* clear links with, or contribution to, the University, the City of Birmingham, or the West Midlands. Alternatively, demonstrate clear links with, or a contribution to, the University’s research specialisms or its activities overseas;
* clear evidence of a significant continuing relationship or clear potential for a significant future relationship between the nominee and the University.

An honorary degree is the highest honour the University can bestow on an individual and is normally conferred at one of our Degree Congregations in July or December at which the honorary graduand makes a speech to graduating students and their guests. As such, Public Honours or other forms of recognition (such as the Guild Awards or various staff and alumni awards) may be a more appropriate form of recognition in some cases.

To avoid possible misconceptions, the University does not:

* consider nominations on the basis of:
  + celebrity status or popular appeal alone;
  + a financial relationship with the University, its subsidiary companies, or related organisations;
* consider nominations for currently serving politicians, civil servants, Heads of State, and individuals who have, or could be perceived to have, direct or significant influence over decisions relating to higher education-related policy and funding (including research) in the UK or overseas;
* normally consider conferring a second honorary degree from the University of Birmingham on the same individual, nor reconsider nominations considered previously unless circumstances and achievements have changed significantly;
* normally consider nominations for serving or retired members of staff (including those holding honorary staff titles) simply on the basis of their service to the University, but may consider these on grounds of exceptional service at a regional, national, or international level;
* consider nominations for currently serving lay members of Council, unless they have indicated an intention to step down;
* consider nominations for those who are not ‘fit and proper persons’ as defined in University Ordinance 4.8, namely a person who is convicted of a criminal offence triable on indictment; or whose name has been removed for misconduct by a properly constituted legal authority from any official register or roll of members of the profession to which they belong;
* consider nominations from or for close friends, partners, or family members;
* consider nominations from individuals nominating themselves.

**Who can make a nomination for an honorary degree?**

Nominations may be proposed by: students, alumni, members of staff, including honorary members of staff, or lay members of the Council of the University.

Nominations must be seconded by: a member of the University Executive Board, a member of one of the College Boards, or one of the Senior Officers.

# What is the process for making a nomination?

1) Please contact Chris Ellison, Secretary to the Honorary Degrees Committee (email: [c.ellison@bham.ac.uk](mailto:c.ellison@bham.ac.uk)) who can confirm that the person you have in mind has not already been honoured by the University (and suggest an appropriate seconder for students and alumni).

2) Please complete the nomination form which is available on the [Honorary Degrees webpage](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/leadership/governance/senate/honorary-degrees-committee/honorary-degrees.aspx). Please submit the completed form to the Secretary to the Honorary Degrees Committee by 5th April 2024. The form enables the Honorary Degrees Committee to consider nominations consistently. Forms with incomplete information will be returned to the proposer.

3) Proposers and seconders of successful nominations will be informed, in confidence, of the outcome of their nomination following the meeting of the Honorary Degrees Committee.

4) Nominations are then considered by the Senate. When the nomination has been approved by the Senate, a formal approach will be made by the Vice-Chancellor to the honorary graduand. The offer gives the full range of graduation dates and seeks details of the graduand’s availability.

When honorary graduands are allocated to ceremonies we try to ensure that, as far as possible, the graduand is matched to the appropriate School or academic discipline. While efforts will be made to associate the conferment with a specific group or School if requested, this is dependent on the availability of honorary graduands, the numbers expected to graduate and the allocation of Schools to ceremonies. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee to be able to match the honorary graduand to a specific group on every occasion.

In order to provide honorary graduands with as much notice as possible of congregation dates, the Honorary Degrees Committee meets once per academic year to consider nominations for honorary degrees to be conferred in Degree Congregations taking place in the following academic year (the Committee will meet in May 2024 to consider nominations for honorary degrees to be conferred in the congregations scheduled for December 2024 and July 2025).

5) If the nominee accepts, proposers and seconders will be informed of the arrangements for the conferral of the honorary degree.

The business of the Honorary Degrees Committee is conducted in strict confidence. **To avoid embarrassment, no mention should be made to the nominee at any stage.** The whole process is confidential, and no names are published unless and until the nomination has been approved by the Senate and the individual concerned has been formally approached and has accepted the University’s offer.