

# THE Entrepreneurs

EY ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR™ 2026



# Contents

Introduction	3
Nomination Process	7
EOY Programme	18
EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year™	22
EY Private	24
Our Team	25
Our Sponsors	27



# Introduction

EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ is a world-class development programme that supports, advises, and connects a community of entrepreneurs, championing entrepreneurship throughout the island of Ireland.

The EOY programme not only ensures national and international recognition for successful finalists and alumni but also provides an invaluable network and business development opportunity within a strong and supportive EOY Alumni community with over 680 members.

**#EOYIreland2026**



# THE Entrepreneurs

The theme for EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ 2026 is “The Entrepreneurs.” This concept shines a light on Ireland’s dynamic entrepreneurial community, using a spectrum of lights to symbolise the individuality and brilliance of each entrepreneur.

Every light represents a unique vision, a bold idea, and the unwavering determination that drives progress. Together, these lights form a powerful collective, illuminating the future of business and innovation in Ireland. It is a celebration of resilience, creativity, and the transformative impact entrepreneurs have on our society and economy.



Entrepreneurship is the heartbeat of Ireland's all island economy, and every year the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year programme reminds us of just how powerful a heartbeat it is. For 29 years, through this globally recognised programme, EY has proudly celebrated the vision, ambition and resilience of the most exceptional business leaders on this island.

Our programme alumni community has grown to more than 680 entrepreneurs who represent some of the most dynamic and innovative businesses across the island. Collectively, they employ over 275,000 people and generate revenues in excess of €28 billion annually. These numbers are impressive, but what truly matters is the impact they make – the jobs created, the communities supported, and the ideas sparked that change how we all live and work. Our alumni span the full spectrum of entrepreneurship, from early-stage start-ups to well-established Irish companies and globally recognised brands, across industries as diverse as food and drink, medical devices, engineering, beauty and technology.

These entrepreneurs are building successful businesses, and shaping Ireland's future at a time when the world is changing around us at breathtaking speed. As we look ahead with confidence, we know their influence will extend far beyond Ireland's borders, driving innovation, sustainability and global competitiveness for the next generation.

This year, our theme "The Entrepreneurs" shines a light on individuality and brilliance. Every entrepreneur brings something unique: a bold idea, a fresh perspective,

a determination to make things better. Together, they illuminate the future of business and innovation in Ireland. That is what this programme celebrates: the courage to think differently and the creativity to turn vision into reality.

As Managing Partner of EY Ireland, I am constantly inspired by the ingenuity and perseverance of these leaders. Their stories remind us that entrepreneurship is all about transformation, impact and possibility. It is about people who dare to challenge convention and create lasting value for society.

I look forward to welcoming our 2026 finalists into this extraordinary community and to another year of celebrating the entrepreneurs who make Ireland a world-class hub of innovation and ambition.

**Frank O'Keeffe**

EY Ireland Managing Partner





“ Being part of the EOY programme has been absolutely wonderful. The energy, talent and experiences that that the alumni share so willingly is something really special.

**Edward McCloskey**

WaterWipes, 2025

International Category & Overall

EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ award winner





## What's Involved | Initiatives

We passionately believe in promoting entrepreneurship across our island and empowering entrepreneurs to grow their businesses both in Ireland and around the world.

### As a finalist your prize includes, but is not limited to:

- Media profiling across national & local newspaper and broadcast media
- Alumni-specific events such as conference days and dinners
- Finalist specific digital content creation and profiling to a global audience
- An invitation to join our annual CEO Retreat
- Bespoke EY Enterprise Evolution Sessions with EY Partners
- In-depth profiling on our website [link to [eoy.ie](https://eoy.ie)] and on our social media platforms
- Business development opportunities with our programme sponsors

### By becoming a finalist, you will also be automatically inducted into the Alumni community.

This collection of the best entrepreneurial businessmen and women across the island of Ireland grows every year. The Alumni harnesses their wealth of experience to create a unique culture, sharing disruptive ideas and knowledge with their fellow Alumni, as well as acting as a support network to each other. We are immensely proud that over 75% of our Alumni do business with one another. EY support our alumni through private sector and key topic interactions on an ongoing basis bringing the best entrepreneurial, thought leader and EY global content to the group.

## Alumni stats

680+

Alumni

75%

of alumni do business  
with one another

€28b

Combined  
revenue

275k

total headcount





“

Being an EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ finalist has been an incredible experience. The calibre of entrepreneurs, the access to world-class insight and guidance, and the sense of community throughout the programme genuinely exceeded my expectations. It's a powerful network to be part of and one that continues to motivate and support you well beyond the programme itself. I feel very lucky and grateful to be part of it.

**Aine Kennedy**

The Smooth Company  
2025 Emerging Category Winner



# Nomination Process | **Nomination Period** 13 Jan - 17 Feb 2026

## Eligibility Criteria :

- EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ is an all-island programme.
- Nominees must own a minimum of 5% of the company (publicly listed companies will be assessed on a case-by-case basis).
- Nominees must be primarily responsible for the recent performance of the company.
- Nominees must either be Irish or running a company based on the island of Ireland.
- Turnover in excess of €1 million or £1 million.
- The nominee's company must be trading for a minimum of two years (companies with a long R&D process pre-commencement of trading, early-stage life sciences and technology companies and companies that have received significant investment are dealt with on a case-by-case basis).
- If nominees have previously applied and not been shortlisted to the final 24, our judging panel welcomes and encourages them to apply multiple times. Some of our previous finalists and even winners have successfully been invited into the programme after multiple applications.

## Who Can Nominate?

Anyone, including employees, company advisors and financiers, can nominate a successful entrepreneur, with the entrepreneur's consent. Many of the nominations come from the entrepreneurs themselves.





# Three Step Process

## 1

### Nomination

Take a few minutes to fill out a nomination form on [eoy.ie](https://eoy.ie) by 17 February 2026.

Nomination forms will be subject to an initial screening process by our independent assessment panel, which may include a follow up call.

## 2

### Interview

If successful, an interview will be scheduled with senior EY personnel, and a comprehensive and confidential report will be written on your company for submission to the judges.

## 3

### Shortlist

After carefully reviewing these reports, our independent judging panel will meet in April to decide who our 24 Finalists will be for 2026.



# Categories

The categories in our EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme apply to a wide range of businesses across all sectors on the island of Ireland.

These range from fast growth entrepreneurial businesses, established international groups to longstanding family enterprises. This wide range of business leaders and entrepreneurs is the backbone of our alumni community and what makes it such a valuable and unique network.

A winner will be selected from each of the Emerging, Established & International Categories, and of these three winners, our overall winner will be selected.



# Emerging

Nominees in the Emerging category run businesses that have been trading for a minimum of two years. They are ambitious entrepreneurs who have started a business which is growing quickly. They are high-potential, dynamic, resourceful and 'ones-to-watch' for the future.

# Established

Established, longstanding businesses with a pedigree of growth and innovation, contributing significantly as employers on the Island of Ireland. Including some of our greatest family businesses, our Established finalists are market leaders in their sectors and have made a significant contribution to the economy over a considerable period of time.

# International

The International category consists of entrepreneurs who are global players. Their companies operate in multiple markets across the globe and can be headquartered here in Ireland or overseas.



# The Sustainability Award

Recognising the critical importance of innovation leadership in meeting our collective sustainability challenges, we introduced our new Sustainability award to the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ Ireland programme in 2022.

This award is presented to the finalist who is making the biggest contribution towards environmental sustainability through their business. They are striving to protect our future by providing solutions and taking transformative business actions to address some of the world's most pressing environmental issues and concerns.





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Being named an EY Entrepreneur of the Year finalist has been a really meaningful experience for me. It gave me a chance to step back from the day to day, appreciate how far Soltec has come, and connect with people who are building incredible things in their own industries. It reminded me why we push so hard for innovation and sustainability, because it genuinely makes a difference.

**David Corcoran**

Soltec Group  
2025 Sustainability Award recipient



# Judging Criteria

Our panel of independent judges is at the heart of the integrity of EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™. When reviewing the judging reports, the judges are looking for evidence of specific entrepreneurial traits:

- Entrepreneurial spirit and vision
- Financial performance
- Innovation
- Strategic direction
- Sustainability and growth in employee numbers
- Industry impact
- Personal integrity/influence
- Risk management

The Independent Judging Panel comprises of previous category and overall winners of The EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme, as well as representatives from our sponsor agencies. The Judging Panel is responsible for choosing the shortlist of 24 finalists, as well as selecting the category and overall winners. Please visit our website to find out more about the judging process, criteria, and judging panel.

**More Information: [eoy.ie](https://eoy.ie)**



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My experience as a finalist in the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme was exceptional and truly pivotal for both me and CreditLogic. The mentorship, challenge and pace of the programme pushed us to think bigger, execute faster and open doors we could not have accessed alone. The CEO retreat broadened our perspective, and the friendships formed with peers were an unexpected highlight. It was an inspiring celebration of an extraordinary community and a meaningful milestone for our team and my family. I'm deeply grateful to EY and all involved for the support, inspiration and generosity throughout the journey.

**Eddie Dillon**

CreditLogic





# 2026 Programme Calendar





# CEO Retreat

Along with our gala awards ceremony, the highlight of the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ calendar is the CEO Retreat.

Our 24 Finalists are invited to join our EOY Alumni on a week-long retreat. This is Ireland's largest unofficial trade mission and offers an exceptional calibre of executive education in the world's top universities, as well as unrivalled networking and business development opportunities for the cohort of Finalists and EOY Alumni who attend. In previous years, our annual CEO Retreats have taken us to many different cities, including Hong Kong, Vancouver, Austin & New York, Singapore, Cape Town and in 2025 we visited Tokyo and Kyoto in Japan.

Year on year, the CEO Retreat has been the source of many new ideas, collaborations, and invaluable relationships for the island's most prestigious entrepreneurs. In 2026 we are excited to travel to Toronto, Canada for our CEO Retreat.

As one of the most technologically advanced economies with a strong industrial and large global trade presence it is the ideal destination to create new connections, receive top class executive education and bring back new ideas and inspiration.

**CEO Retreat highlights**





# Female Forum

The past few years of the EOY programme have seen the largest cohorts of female finalists enter the programme. We believe that is vital to support and encourage our female alumni members and promote entrepreneurship amongst women in Ireland.

A key element of our EOY Alumni Community is our Female Forum, where our female alumni members and prominent Irish female entrepreneurs and leaders come together to discuss ideas, collaborate, and encourage each other to continue in their pursuit of entrepreneurship.

We are incredibly proud of the achievements of all of our female Alumni Members, and we are always looking out for the best and brightest female entrepreneurs in Ireland to join our ever-expanding alumni community and attend our various female forum events.







“

Being selected as a finalist for The EY Entrepreneur of the Year™ programme was hugely positive and rewarding experience. Being able to connect with so many incredible entrepreneurs and forge lasting friendships and connections with them has been fantastic. The alumni network is incredible source of support, advice, and inspiration. The collective experience and business expertise of these brilliant business minds is beyond compare. Being part of the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year programme has been hugely positive experience for us and one that we would recommend to any entrepreneur

**Maxine & Rosaleen Hyde**

Ballymaloe Foods



“

I was genuinely humbled to be selected for the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme. The care and compassion shown throughout, from the CEO Retreat to the in-person events

and the EY business updates, made it a truly life-changing experience.

You may not always speak the same business language as the other entrepreneurs in the room, but you're all operating on the same frequency - driven, ambitious and committed to making your business better.

The support from EY, the Alumni and the judges pushes you out of your comfort zone, challenges your internal limits and gives you the confidence to back yourself. It turns ideas into reality and shows you what's truly possible; an experience never to be forgotten.

**James Kelly**

LMH Engineering





# EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year™

EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ is a global programme run by EY in over 145 cities across 60 countries worldwide. Every June, individual country winners come together in Monte Carlo for the EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year™ Awards.

Sharon Cunningham and Orlaith Ryan co-founders of Shorla Oncology represented Ireland at the EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year™ Awards in June 2025 in Monaco. Stina Ehrensvärd, co-founder of Yubico was named EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year™ 2025. The interconnection between all of the global EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programmes is another example of the invaluable benefits of the programme.

This year, we are delighted that Edward McCloskey of WaterWipes will be representing Ireland in June 2026. We are excited to be able to share more information with you about this event in the coming months.

Previous speakers at EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year™ include, singer-songwriter, humanitarian & philanthropist Bono, Martha Stewart of Martha Stewart Omnimedia; Paul Polman of Unilever; Alma Clooney, International Human Rights Attorney; Dan Schulman President and CEO of PayPal; and Felix Baumgartner, Pilot, Red Bull Stratos, to name but a few.





“

The entrepreneur of the year programme was nothing short of extraordinary. It is not hyperbole to say it was life-changing and indeed it has materially altered the growth trajectory of GRID Finance in the coming years. I developed a brilliant diverse peer group with the other finalists and had access to the brightest brains in the Irish business community. The programme gave me a great opportunity to step and look at the business afresh and really double down on our scaling ambition. Crucially, being a finalist is not a one off experience – you gain a network of supporters through the community for life which I know will have a long-term impact for us.

**Derek Foley Butler**

GRID Finance

2025 Established Award Winner





# EY Private

EY has unrivalled global experience of advising and supporting the world's leading private businesses, from Silicon Valley to multi-generational family businesses to our best-in-class EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme. This is the core focus of our global firm.

As a leader of a private or family business, you have the drive to challenge and grow your business to its full potential. As globally connected advisors who appreciate your ownership mindset, our EY Private specialists and teams are dedicated to helping you drive your strategy and are personally invested in supporting private businesses reach their true potential. In EY we are, 'Advisors to the Ambitious'.



For the past 29 years, EY Ireland has been proud to celebrate and support Ireland's entrepreneurial community through the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ (EOY) programme. Every year the calibre of nominations we receive from entrepreneurs throughout our island surpasses expectations, and I am confident that 2026 will be no different.

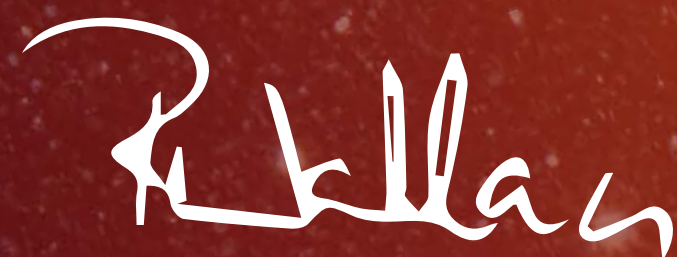
One of the greatest strengths of Ireland's entrepreneurial ecosystem is its diverse composition. Once again, this year, we are actively seeking nominations from entrepreneurs of all stages and experiences across all sectors throughout Ireland North and South.

From the nominations we receive 24 finalists will be selected to participate in a rewarding and fast-paced strategic growth programme over the course of 9 months which includes a week-long CEO Retreat to Canada in May, tailored media profiling and dedicated strategy sessions.

Many past participants tell us that the primary benefit of being a finalist is membership of our acclaimed EOY alumni network. This unrivalled network comprises of 680 of Ireland's brightest and most talented entrepreneurial leaders who collectively employ more than 275,000 people and generate over €28 billion in revenues. The EOY Alumni represent resilience, creativity and progress. As well as providing unrivalled support, guidance and mentorship more than three quarters of our

alumni do business together. This network is only open to business leaders who have been finalists of the EOY programme making it the premium business network for entrepreneurs in Ireland.

As Partner Lead for EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ Ireland, it is a genuine privilege to celebrate and support Ireland's extraordinary entrepreneurial talent. These visionary leaders are the shining lights of Irish business who transform our society and economy through their resilience and creativity. I am very much looking forward to welcoming this year's finalists into the EOY programme and seeing their contribution to the powerhouse that is the EOY network in Ireland.



**Roger Wallace**  
Head of Assurance, Partner





# EOY Team

The EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ team are the energy and drive responsible for delivering the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme.

Contact us on [eoyn@ie.ey.com](mailto:eoyn@ie.ey.com) if you have any questions, want to find out more or need assistance during the nomination process.



**Eimear McCrann**

Director EY Entrepreneur  
Of The Year™ & EY Private

086 065 2598  
[eimear.mccrann@ie.ey.com](mailto:eimear.mccrann@ie.ey.com)



**Anne Marie Butler**

Manager EY Entrepreneur  
of the Year™

087 654 6739  
[anne.marie.butler@ie.ey.com](mailto:anne.marie.butler@ie.ey.com)



**Katie Donnelly**

Assistant Manager  
EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™

087 195 0169  
[katie.donnelly@ie.ey.com](mailto:katie.donnelly@ie.ey.com)



**Gillian Ladden**

Senior Associate  
EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™

087 446 9975  
[gillian.ladden@ie.ey.com](mailto:gillian.ladden@ie.ey.com)



**Ella Cooley**

Associate  
EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™

087 199 9154  
[Ella.cooley@ie.ey.com](mailto:Ella.cooley@ie.ey.com)

# Join Us Online

For more detailed information on the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ programme & all our initiatives please visit our website.

Digital nomination forms can be filled in and submitted on our website while our nomination window is open. **Apply Now**



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#TheEntrepreneurs



# Our Sponsors





### Premium Corporate Partner

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For over 130 years, Julius Baer has helped individuals and families grow and preserve their wealth. Throughout this time, we have demonstrated the same pioneering mind-set as many of our clients, with our entrepreneurial spirit stemming from our rich family heritage as a private bank. Thanks to our ongoing international expansion, we have the unique ability to provide our private clients with truly global expertise, delivered at a local level. We build our relationships based on trust. In today's challenging and often uncertain economic and political climate, our investment approach is engineered to provide an attractive return while taking into account each individual's unique needs approach to risk. We offer a wide range of investment and wealth planning services, meaning we can provide a tailored solution based on individual needs. We blend heritage and stability with a forward thinking, innovative approach. This is demonstrated not only in how we manage our clients' wealth, but also by how we support the next generation.

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-  [@juliusbaer](#)
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### Government Agency Sponsors



As the regional business development agency, Invest Northern Ireland's role is to grow the local economy. It does this by supporting new and existing businesses to innovate, create jobs, and sell outside Northern Ireland, whilst also attracting new investment to the region. Invest NI provides strong government support for businesses as part of the Department for the Economy by delivering the Government's economic development strategies. Invest Northern Ireland has been part of the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year™ since day one and have provided an incredible amount of support throughout the years.

-  [Website](#)
-  [@InvestNI\\_Europe](#)
-  [LinkedIn](#)



Enterprise Ireland is the Irish government agency responsible for the development and growth of Irish companies internationally in order to grow exports and jobs. Enterprise Ireland works with entrepreneurs and businesses to help them to start-up, develop innovative products and services, and scale internationally. Since the very beginning, Enterprise Ireland has been an amazing supporter of the programme and has made a huge contribution over the years.

-  [Website](#)
-  [@Entirl](#)
-  [LinkedIn](#)



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The Irish Times is Ireland’s leading quality news media publisher. Founded in 1859, it enjoys a weekly readership of 1.2 million in print and online.

The Irish Times is an authoritative and independent commentator and analyst of events nationally and internationally in print, on mobile and online. It is the only Irish news organisation with a network of correspondents around the world, who provide a view of the world through Irish eyes. The Irish Times Group is the owner of two national titles, The Irish Times and the Irish Examiner, seven regional newspapers, two radio stations, MyHome.ie and a number of other digital assets. It is also the largest contract printer in Ireland. Governed by a Trust to guarantee its independence and uphold its ethos of quality and trusted content, The Irish Times Group is the largest Irish-owned news media publisher on the island.

-  Website
-  @IrishTimes
-  LinkedIn

newSTALK

The Irish Times is Ireland’s leading quality news media publisher. Founded in 1859, it enjoys a weekly readership of 1.2 million in print and online.

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-  Website
-  @NewsTalk
-  LinkedIn



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Enabled by data and technology, diverse EY teams in over 150 countries provide trust through assurance and help clients grow, transform and operate.

Working across Assurance, Consulting, Law, Strategy, Tax and Transactions, EY teams ask better questions to find new answers for the complex issues facing our world today.

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