Queen Elizabeth Prize
for Engineering

Strictly Embargoed: 19:30 GMT on 3 February 2026

Neural interface pioneers win 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering

The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering honours nine engineers whose pioneering work on modern neural interfaces has restored lost human function and had a lasting impact for people around the world.

Tuesday 3 February, 2026, London, UK: The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering (QEPrize) has been awarded to Graeme Clark, Erwin Hochmair, Ingeborg Hochmair, Blake Wilson, John Donoghue, Alim Louis Benabid, Pierre Pollak, Jocelyne Bloch and Grégoire Courtine for the design and development of modern neural interfaces that restore human function.

This year's Laureates have delivered pioneering achievements in neuroengineering, demonstrating the extraordinary power of engineering to overcome physical limitations. Their work enables technology to interact directly with the brain and nervous system to restore abilities such as hearing, movement, and communication for people affected by sensory loss, paralysis, and neurological disease.

Together, these advances mark a new frontier in neuroprosthetics, where engineering and medicine converge to restore capabilities once thought lost forever. Spanning several decades of research and clinical translation, the Laureates' contributions have transformed complex neuroscience into practical technologies that have restored independence and improved quality of life for growing numbers of people worldwide.

Modern neural interfaces encompass a range of technologies that connect engineered systems with the nervous system to restore function. Among the most established of these are cochlear implants, which convert sound into electrical signals that directly stimulate the auditory nerve, enabling people who are severe to profoundly deaf to regain functional hearing.

Professor Graeme Clark AC, Professor Erwin Hochmair, Dr Ingeborg Hochmair, and Professor Blake Wilson are recognised for their collective contributions to the development of cochlear implants, including advances in electrical stimulation, multi-channel systems, miniaturisation, and sound processing. Their groundbreaking work has transformed cochlear implants from experimental devices into reliable neural prostheses used by over a million people around the world.

Professor John Donoghue is recognised for his foundational leadership in advancing brain–computer interfaces, creating systems that decode neural activity from the motor cortex to restore movement and communication. His work demonstrated that neural signals could be translated into commands for external devices, establishing core engineering principles that underpin the field.

Professor Alim Louis Benabid and Professor Pierre Pollak pioneered modern deep brain stimulation, a therapy that uses targeted electrical stimulation to alleviate symptoms of neurological movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease. Their engineering contributions to electrode design and programmable stimulation systems have revolutionised treatment for thousands of patients.

Professor Jocelyne Bloch and Professor Grégoire Courtine are recognised for their development of electronic spinal stimulation technology, which reactivates neural circuits controlling locomotion. By

combining targeted electrical stimulation with advanced rehabilitation approaches, their work has enabled individuals with spinal cord injuries to regain voluntary movement.

These innovative achievements have redefined what engineering can achieve in medicine. Through decades of sustained innovation, their work highlights the role of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing some of the most complex challenges in healthcare.

"My work in auditory brain science began with the aim of restoring hearing for people with severe deafness, inspired in part by my own family's experience. Over time, this research showed that multi-channel stimulation of the auditory nerve could restore elements of hearing, opening the door to an entirely new field of medical engineering. I am honoured to be recognised alongside my colleagues by the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering, and proud to see how this field has grown to help people with a wide range of neurological conditions." **Professor Graeme Clark AC**

"This honour recognises not only a technological achievement, but a belief we have held from the very beginning - that engineering, guided by compassion and scientific integrity, can fundamentally change lives. Cochlear implants were once considered impossible by many. Today, they demonstrate what can be achieved when engineers, clinicians, and users work together with a shared purpose." ***Dr Ingeborg Hochmair***

"From the earliest experiments, our goal was to create a neural interface that could work in harmony with the human auditory system over a lifetime. This recognition by the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering affirms the importance of long-term thinking, scientific persistence, and engineering solutions that truly serve people." ***Professor Erwin Hochmair***

"I am overjoyed to receive the 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering alongside my fellow Laureates. The QEPrize represents the highest recognitions in engineering, celebrating achievements that span the full breadth of the field. I am delighted to be among the 2026 Laureates, all of whom I admire greatly." **Professor Blake Wilson**

"I am deeply honoured to receive the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering, particularly in the company of this year's Laureates and past recipients. The goal of our work in brain-computer interfaces has always been to help people living with paralysis and to unravel the mystery of brain codes to restore movement, control, and communication. It has been immensely gratifying to see advances toward those goals in our own BrainGate clinical trials, as well as through the work of research groups around the world. I am confident that progress made in brain computer interfaces will lead to revolutionary new treatments for people with paralysis and many other brain disorders." **Professor John Donoghue**

"I am grateful that this work has been recognised through the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering. Deep brain stimulation at High Frequency (DBS -HF) emerged from the observation that stimulation at high frequency of neural structures could inhibit their abnormal neural activity, rather than removing or destroying them. This approach introduced a new way of thinking about the treatment of movement and other disorders and demonstrated how bio-engineering principles can be applied directly to the functioning of the human brain." **Professor Alim Louis Benabid**

"I am deeply honoured to receive the 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering with my colleague and friend, Professor *Alim Louis Benabid, as well as other eminent colleagues. As a doctor, I have*

always been fascinated by the idea of contributing to the discovery of new therapies for disabling disorders, particularly neurological ones. As a researcher, I have tried to understand the mechanisms at the origin of symptoms or those generated by pharmacological or engineering therapies through the brain-machine interface. Multidisciplinary teamwork has made the discovery and development of DBS possible, but much research remains to be done to understand and modulate the extraordinary complexity of neural language." **Professor Pierre Pollak**

"Neurosurgery teaches humility. Innovation demands audacity. This journey has required both—and this prize recognises that this unlikely combination was essential to advance treatments for people with paralysis." **Professor Jocelyne Bloch**

"Our collective effort to build a world in which paralysis is no longer a life sentence has been neither swift nor easy. This prize does not mark the end of the journey, but the responsibility — and the encouragement—to continue the fight against paralysis. Onward!" **Professor Grégoire Courtine**

"Engineering is central to the Government's mission to drive innovation for all our benefit. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the phenomenal advances made by this year's Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering Laureates, whose work is giving hope to people who've suffered injuries and illnesses that profoundly impact their everyday lives."

"The QEPrize also plays a unique and vital role in inspiring the next generation of engineers, who we want to stay here in the UK. Their work will be central to the success of the high-growth potential industries of the future, right across the spectrum of science and technology." **Liz Kendall, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology**

"The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering recognises engineers whose pioneering work has delivered lasting benefits to people all over the world. Through decades of sustained innovation, this year's Laureates have shown how engineering working alongside medicine can address loss of function and improve quality of life.

"By honouring these achievements, the Prize celebrates engineering at its very best - innovation driven by purpose, collaboration across disciplines, and a commitment to meeting real human need. We are proud to recognise these engineers and their outstanding contribution to society." **Lord Vallance, Chair, Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering Foundation**

"This year's winning innovation stood out for the judges because of its clear and demonstrable impact on people's lives. Modern neural interfaces represent engineering at its most powerful, translating deep scientific understanding into practical solutions that restore essential human functions.

"While the field encompasses a range of different technologies at different stages of maturity, together they exemplify the engineering excellence the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering seeks to recognise - work that combines rigour, creativity, and major contributions to society." **Professor Dame Lynn Gladden, Chair of Judging Panel, Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering**

Entering its thirteenth year, the QEPrize continues to honour engineers whose innovations have delivered profound benefits to society. The 2026 Laureates join a distinguished group of engineers whose work has improved the lives of millions of people worldwide. The Laureates will share the

£500,000 prize, and were formally announced by Lord Vallance, Chair of the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering Foundation, at the Science Museum in London.

The Laureates will be formally honoured at a QEPrize Presentation Ceremony at a later date, when they will receive a unique trophy, designed by the 2026 Create the Trophy winner Kayla Taqiya, aged 21, from Indonesia. The annual Create the Trophy competition gives young people aged 14-24 the opportunity to test their design skills using the latest in 3D-design technology – two 14 year old designers were also highly commended this year: Laura Smith from Scotland and Hafsa Tanveer from Pakistan.

To find out more about this year's winning innovation, visit www.qeprize.org/winners

ENDS

Additional Quotes from the QEPrize Judges:

Professor Orla Feely
"The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering recognises extraordinary innovation in neural interfaces that are helping to restore human capability. This work applies brilliant engineering, in collaboration with disciplines such as medicine, to restore the ability to hear, to walk, and to interact with the world. For the individuals whose lives are transformed, the impact is remarkable - and engineering is at the heart of it - a powerful demonstration of what can be achieved moving forwards through cross-discipline collaboration."

Professor Nick Jennings
"The winners of the 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering have developed an exciting suite of neural interface technologies that have a significant impact on individuals and society. From restoring hearing to improving mobility, their work shows how engineering can help people participate more fully in everyday life, while opening up extraordinary possibilities for the future."

Professor Tatsuya Okubo
"This Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering is especially important because of the diversity of its judging panel – bringing together experts from different backgrounds, regions, genders and generations."

Dr Tsu-Jae Liu
"This multidisciplinary approach not only explains the multifaceted impact we see today, but also why the judges see such strong potential for continued progress in this field."

Dr Abdigani Diriye
"The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering recognises neural interfaces, a rapidly advancing domain that brings together microelectronics, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence. What makes this work so compelling is the profound impact it is already having in restoring people's ability to hear, move, and communicate. The QEPrize is important because it recognises engineers whose innovations meaningfully impact society, while also helping to inspire the next generation of engineers."

Professor Carlos Henrique de Brito Cruz
"The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering has a characteristic that sets it apart from previous years: it helps people directly in their everyday lives, rather than in a mediating way. What is

particularly impressive about this year's winner is the breadth of its reach and the wide range of possibilities that neural interfaces offer in helping people as this field continues to develop."

Professor Viola Vogel
"The beauty of the 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering lies in the way the winners have developed technologies that restore some lost brain functions, including the ability to hear, by creating devices that pick up voices and stimulate the brain accordingly. The brain is the most remarkable organ we have, yet coping with the loss of certain brain functions remains a profound challenge — and this work shows how engineering can help address that challenge."

Professor Teck Seng Low
"What impresses me most about this engineering achievement is the passion and dedication these engineers bring to their work. They have taken technologies from the laboratory and translated them into scalable solutions that restore human function. This is a deeply inclusive innovation, enabling people to regain their place in their communities and participate more fully in society."

Professor Tuula Teeri
"The 2026 Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering recognises neural interfaces as an achievement made possible by many different branches of engineering coming together. It is a powerful example of how outstanding engineering can move from the laboratory into practical, life-changing use. Engineering is based on science, but it is also about doing - applying knowledge to improve conditions for people and society."

Interview Requests

For more information or to request an interview with any of the judging panel please contact:

Edelman

Francesca Pierpoint | francesca.pierpoint@edelman.com| QE@edelman.com | +44 7875 198091

Brydie Allen| brydie.allen@edelman.com| QE@edelman.com | +44 7740 038925

Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering

Jane Sutton | jane.sutton@raeng.org.uk | +44 20 7766 0636

Notes to Editors:

About the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering

Diverse, multifaceted, and continually evolving, engineering creates the solutions to global challenges and improves billions of lives. Engineers have enabled us to work together across the planet, explore the smallest cells and the most distant stars, and navigate our way through the world.

Awarded annually, the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering (QEPrize) champions bold, groundbreaking engineering innovation which is of global benefit to humanity. The prize celebrates engineering's visionaries, inspiring young minds to consider engineering as a career choice and to help to solve the challenges of the future.

The prize also encourages engineers to help extend the boundaries of what is possible across all disciplines and applications.

The Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering is open to:

- Up to ten living individuals;
- Of any nationality;
- Who are personally responsible for a groundbreaking innovation in engineering which has been of global benefit to humanity. Self-nomination is not permitted.

The judges will use these criteria to select the winner, or winners, of the QEPrize:

- What is it that they have done that is a ground-breaking innovation in engineering?
- In what way has this innovation been of global benefit to humanity?
- Are there any other individuals who might claim to have had a pivotal role in this development?