Three women named Britain's Brightest Young Scientists, each winning 'unrestricted' £100,000 Blavatnik Awards prize

Maxie M. Roessler, Thi Hoang Duong (Kelly) Nguyen, and Paola Pinilla all recognised at London gala ceremony, where the top prize was claimed by women for only the second time.

24 February 2026 – London — The Blavatnik Family Foundation and The New York Academy of Sciences tonight announced the three 2026 Laureates of the Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists in the United Kingdom, who each receive £100,000 – the nation's largest unrestricted prize for science.

The Laureates were announced tonight at a gala dinner and awards ceremony held at the historic Banqueting House in London. The recipients, selected from nine outstanding Finalists, are recognised for exceptional early-career achievements across the Life Sciences, Chemical Sciences, and Physical Sciences & Engineering. The remaining six Finalists are each awarded £30,000 in recognition of their exceptional scientific contributions.

It is the second time in the United Kingdom that all three Laureates in the Blavatnik Awards are women scientists. The 2026 Laureates are:

- **Life Sciences: Thi Hoang Duong (Kelly) Nguyen, PhD** (*MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology*): Dr. Thi Hoang Duong Nguyen is a molecular biologist whose research provides critical insight into how telomerase — an enzyme that protects chromosome ends during cell division — functions during DNA replication, why it becomes dysregulated in premature ageing and cancer, and how specific regions of the enzyme could serve as future therapeutic targets. She was recognised for applying cryo-electron microscopy to render the first atomic-level model of telomerase.

- **Chemical Sciences**: **Maxie M. Roessler, DPhil** (*Imperial College London):* Prof. Maxie Roessler is a bioinorganic chemist who has uncovered the hidden steps in how cells generate energy through processes that rely on short-lived, highly reactive transfer of electrons. She was recognised for developing powerful, innovative electron paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy techniques that revealed the intricacies of these electron states and could guide future chemical research, including the design of better catalysts and new functional materials.

- **Physical Sciences & Engineering: Paola Pinilla, PhD** (*University College London*): Dr. Paola Pinilla is an astrophysicist whose research deepens our understanding of the first steps of planet formation, unlocking new insights into the origins of planetary systems like our own. Combining telescope observations with advanced modelling, she discovered pressure structures in

protoplanetary discs that trap dust and enable planet formation, revealing where planets are forming in the universe and how water and the building blocks of life can form within these discs.

The Ceremony

Professor Deborah Prentice, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, who served as the evening's presenter, announced the Laureates during the ceremony. During her remarks, she commented on how supporting young scientists through the Blavatnik Awards provides "*grounds for optimism about the future of this country. Current plans for growth in the UK economy rest heavily on science and technology. And decades of investment mean the UK's educational infrastructure is incredible – drawing in talent, using it superbly and efficiently*."

"The exceptional talent celebrated through these Awards reflects the creativity and ambition that continue to place the UK at the forefront of scientific advancement," **Sir Leonard Blavatnik, Founder of Access Industries and the Blavatnik Family Foundation**. *"It is a privilege to recognise their work and to support the next stage of their scientific journeys."*

"This is a remarkable group of Laureates whose work reflects both scientific brilliance and real-world impact," said **Professor Nicholas B. Dirks, President and CEO of The New York Academy of Sciences and Chair of the Awards' Scientific Advisory Council**. *"Notably, this marks the second time in the history of the Blavatnik Awards in the United Kingdom that all three Laureates are women scientists. On behalf of The New York Academy of Sciences, we celebrate the representation and success of women in science and congratulate these winning Laureates."*

The Blavatnik Awards

The Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists are the largest unrestricted prizes available to scientists across the UK aged 42 or younger. Now in their ninth year in the UK, the Blavatnik Awards recognise research with the potential to transform lives, advance scientific understanding, and address global challenges across disciplines.

An independent jury of leading expert scientists selected the Laureates from a pool of 91 nominees representing 46 academic and research institutions across the United Kingdom. Since the launch of the Blavatnik Awards in the UK in 2017, 73 honourees have received nearly £3.3 million (US$4.5 million) in prize funding, providing critical, flexible support for high-risk, high-reward research.

The Blavatnik Awards in the UK sit alongside the Blavatnik National Awards and Regional Awards in the United States, as well as the Blavatnik Awards in Israel. By the close of 2026, the Blavatnik Awards will have awarded more than US$20 million to over 500 scientists and engineers worldwide.

Members of the public are invited to learn more about the 2026 Blavatnik Awards in the UK honourees and their research at a free public symposium, **"Leading with Discovery: UK Scientists Shaping Global**

Science," taking place on Wednesday, 25 February 2026, from 10:00–15:00 GMT at the Royal Society of Medicine, London. Registration is free and open to all. Register **HERE**.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

To follow the progress of the Blavatnik Awards, please visit www.blavatnikawards.org or follow @BlavatnikAwards on X and Facebook

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About the Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists
The Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists, established by the Blavatnik Family Foundation in 2007 and independently administered by The New York Academy of Sciences, began by identifying outstanding scientific talent in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. In 2014, the Blavatnik National Awards were created to recognise faculty-rank scientists throughout the United States. In 2017, the Awards were further expanded to honour faculty-rank scientists in the UK and Israel. For updates about the Blavatnik Awards for Young Scientists, please visit www.blavatnikawards.org or follow us on X and Facebook @BlavatnikAwards.

About the Blavatnik Family Foundation
The Blavatnik Family Foundation provides many of the world's best researchers, scientists, and future leaders with the support and funding needed to solve humankind's greatest challenges. Led by Sir Leonard Blavatnik, founder of Access Industries, the Foundation advances and promotes innovation, discovery, and creativity to benefit the whole of society. Over the past decade, the Foundation has contributed over US$1.3 billion to more than 250 organizations. See more at www.blavatnikfoundation.org.

About The New York Academy of Sciences
The New York Academy of Sciences is an independent, not-for-profit organization that, since 1817, has been committed to advancing science for the benefit of society. With more than 20,000 Members in 100 countries, the Academy advances scientific and technical knowledge, addresses global challenges with science-based solutions, and sponsors a wide variety of educational initiatives at all levels for STEM and STEM-related fields. The Academy hosts programs and publishes content in the areas of life and physical sciences, the social sciences, nutrition, artificial intelligence, computer science, and sustainability. The Academy also provides professional and educational resources for researchers across all phases of their careers. Please visit us online at nyas.org.

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