

Speech: Karen Bradley toasts success of NI Commonwealth Games Team

Good evening.

It is my great pleasure, as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to welcome you all to Stormont House this evening to celebrate the success of the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games squad.

It was a magnificent achievement on the world stage and as a passionate supporter of sport I only wish I could have been there in person to cheer you on!

You even managed to bring some of the Australian sunshine along with you tonight, even if it is a few degrees cooler than what you experienced on the Gold Coast!

For a small country we have once again excelled and shown that big is not always best -, securing a total of 12 medals across a range of disciplines. It is fantastic to see some of those on display here this evening.

This was of course our best ever medal haul for a Games hosted outside the United Kingdom and matched our second best ever medal tally.

Special mention goes to Rhys McClenaghan for his fantastic Gold medal winning performance in the Men's Pommel event – a feat made all the more remarkable by the fact that he beat reigning Olympic and World Champion, Max Whitlock from England.

Congratulations also goes to Kirsty Barr and Gareth McAuley for their respective Silver and Bronze medals in shooting and Leon Reid for his impressive bronze in the men's 200 metres.

And of course, we cannot forget all of those who carried on our proud tradition of medal winning in boxing with Brendan Irvine, Kurt Walker, Aidan Walsh, Kristina O'Hara, Carly McNaul, Michaela Walsh, Stephen Donnelly and James McGivern securing an impressive haul of eight silver and bronze medals.

Beyond those medal-winners, let me congratulate every one of you who were selected to be part of this team. I want to take an opportunity to acknowledge the long years of preparation and dedication that went into that achievement. And for those of who have supported, advised and trained our athletes every step of the way, we thank you too.

Above all, your achievements will help inspire a generation of young people to follow their own sporting dreams and believe that nothing is impossible. In my former role, I was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport – a role which left me with an enduring passion for the impact sport has on individual lives. It teaches valuable life-lessons, encourages confidence and self-discipline, but above all – it encourages you to be the very best that

you can be. Your achievements have left a lasting legacy and you should feel enormously proud of that contribution to the wider society.

Congratulations once again on your fabulous achievements. I look forward to meeting you all and hearing about your own individual performances and experiences during the course of this evening.

Thank you.