

First Minister announces St David Awards finalists

The St David Awards are the national awards of Wales. They acknowledge the extraordinary achievements of people in or from Wales and recognise the great deeds and contributions made by people from all walks of life.

Announcing the finalists, First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“The St David Awards, now in their 4th year, are all about celebrating people who have gone the extra mile to make a difference to someone else’s life, overcome adversity or achieved something truly inspirational.

“Once again, the St David Awards finalists are an exceptional group of people. Every single one is a credit to Wales – it is going to be tough to choose the winners! I look forward to celebrating their outstanding achievements at the awards ceremony on 23 March.”

The finalists in the award categories: Bravery; Citizenship; Culture; Enterprise; Innovation, Science and Technology; International; Sport; and Young Person are as follows.

Bravery

Firefighters Gary Slack and Billy Connor. In August 2016, on-call firefighters Gary Slack and Billy Connor braved strong currents at Castle Beach, Tenby, to save 2 children from drowning.

PC Christopher Bluck and PC Rhys Edwards, South Wales Police. In March 2016, police constables Christopher Bluck and Rhys Edwards risked their own safety to save the life of a woman who had set herself on fire and was armed with a handgun.

Pontardawe Fire Crew. In July 2016, the fire crew were called to a house which was on fire with 2 young boys trapped inside. The crew battled dangerous conditions and 800 degree heat to save one of the children, a 3 year old boy, from the fire. The second child was also recovered from the property but tragically died.

Citizenship

Special Constable Cairn Newton-Evans, Dyfed-Powys Police. Having been a victim of a violent homophobic hate crime, Cairn joined the police to try to stop such attacks happening to others. Cairn is a regular volunteer and a passionate advocate for LGBT rights.

21 Plus, Down’s syndrome support charity. Run by 3 mothers who each have

children with Down's syndrome, the charity has gone from strength to strength over the past 10 years.

Anthony Evans, education campaigner for disabled students. Spurred on while looking to further improve his severely disabled son's education, Anthony has campaigned for post-19 education for severely disabled adults. Thanks to Anthony's efforts, a day college for disabled young adults in Wales was established in September 2016.

Culture

Elfed Roberts, Chief Executive of the National Eisteddfod. Having been at the festival's helm for nearly 25 years, Elfed has ensured the Eisteddfod continues to grow and develop, while remaining contemporary and welcoming to all.

Professor Jen Wilson, jazz musician and archivist. For more than 50 years, Jen has played a central role in promoting jazz music in Wales and in documenting its history and social impact – and in particular the role of women in jazz.

The Cory Band. Established in Treorchy in 1884, the brass band has a reputation for excellence. They made history in 2016 by becoming the first band to be quadruple champions; simultaneously holding the National, Open, European and Brass in Concert titles.

Enterprise

Llaeth y Llan – The Village Dairy, yogurt producers. A family run business, developed through diversification of a farm in Conwy, Llaeth y Llan produces yogurts sold across Wales and the UK. They believe their business is only as good as their 43 staff and put an emphasis on training and investing in the community.

David Banner, video games director. As well as being a multi-award winning games director and managing director of Wales Interactive, Dai has been instrumental in the growth of Wales' games industry. He founded the annual Wales Games Show in 2012 and created the GamesLab project, a digital development initiative for the University of South Wales, which has nurtured hundreds of students and provides a global platform for Welsh digital companies.

Halen Môn – Anglesey Sea Salt. Owners Alison and David Lea-Wilson have succeeded in starting a sustainable, successful business which employs local people with environmental and educational principles whilst also attracting tourists to Anglesey.

Innovation, Science and Technology

Jessica Leigh Jones, astrophysicist and engineer. The astrophysics graduate and former UK Young Engineer of the Year received the Intel Inspiration Award for Entrepreneurship for developing a series of novel fibre optic

transducers. An advocate for technical sciences, she is also director of the Engineering Education Scheme Wales and patron of Science and Engineering at Alton Convent School.

Professor Meena Upadhyaya OBE, geneticist. Britain's first female British-Indian professor in medical genetics within the UK, Meena's career focused on identifying genetic disorders. Meena has made a difference to people's lives either through her medical research or community and charity work and received an OBE in 2016 for services to medical genetics and the Welsh Asian community.

Genesis Biosciences. In a market dominated by harsh and sometimes dangerous chemical cleaners, Genesis develops products that put customers' safety and the environment first. This approach has been recognised through a number of industry awards, including the EDIE Sustainability Leaders Awards 2015 and the Technology and Innovation Business of the Year category at the 2015 Cardiff Business Awards.

International

Dr David Nott OBE, warzone surgeon. Each year, for the past 23 years, David has taken unpaid leave from his job as consultant surgeon at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital to work for aid agencies and provide surgical treatment to the victims of conflict and catastrophe. David and his wife, Elly, have also established the David Nott Foundation, raising hundreds of thousands of pounds for charity and providing surgical training to front line medics.

Nizar Dahan, international volunteer. Nizar works for the Human Relief Foundation and is nominated for his extensive international humanitarian work in response to the refugee crisis and for establishing the Swansea Humanitarian Aid Response Project, which supports displaced and vulnerable people.

Professor Carl G. Jones MBE, conservation biologist. Professor Jones has dedicated his life to restoring endangered animal populations and habitats, and is regarded as one of the most accomplished conservationists on earth. He is responsible for saving from extinction the Mauritius kestrel, 3 species of reptiles, a fruit bat and several plants.

Sport

Wales International Football Squad, UEFA Euro 2016. The Wales National football team, led by Chris Coleman, reached the semi-final of the Euros 2016. The squad were first class ambassadors for Wales, both on and off the pitch, and their strapline of "Together Stronger" has inspired the nation and captured worldwide interest.

The Welsh Members of TeamGB Olympics and Paralympic, Rio 2016. The 24 Welsh athletes selected by TeamGB was the largest ever overseas contingent of Welsh athletes at an Olympic Games, while the 26 Welsh Paralympics athletes accounted for 10% of the Great Britain team. 2016 was a very successful year for the Welsh athletes, while they also represented the country with dignity

and courage.

Anne Ellis OBE, Sport Ambassador. In July 2016, Anne Ellis stepped down as President of Hockey Wales, after 20 years at the helm. During the past 2 decades, Welsh Hockey has seen significant changes and Anne has been involved in it all.

Young Person

Brittany Davies, volunteer for looked after children. Brittany became looked after at the age of 16 and, despite many significant and harrowing challenges, she is now studying for her A Levels and volunteers regularly to help others in similar situations.

Savannah Lloyd, mental health volunteer. Having battled mental health problems since she was 11 years old, Savannah uses her experiences to reach out and help others in similar situations.

Elan Môn Gilford, sport volunteer. Despite 18 year old Elan's hearing loss, she volunteers 8 to 10 hours a week to coach sport sessions, children's karate and netball. Elan also runs a community sign language course.

[News story: UK urges Coalition to maintain momentum against Daesh](#)

With Daesh losing in both Iraq and Syria, Ministers considered the Coalition campaign plan for 2017. This included plans for the operation to liberate Western Mosul, which the Defence Secretary reviewed with the Iraqi Prime Minister and Defence Minister during his visit to Iraq last weekend. With eastern Mosul recently liberated by Iraqi forces, operations to free the west of the city from Daesh's tyranny will start shortly.

The RAF has been in action, striking Daesh around the approaches to the city in recent weeks ahead of the launch of the operation, including sinking a Daesh heavy machine gun team last week on a boat on the River Tigris. On Tuesday careful surveillance operations allowed a building on the north-western outskirts of Mosul to be identified as a Daesh headquarters. With Iraqi forces keeping close watch from across the Tigris, a flight of Typhoons were able to conduct a highly accurate attack late at night – two Paveway IVs demolished the target.

[RAF Typhoons bomb a Daesh HQ](#)

RAF fast jets and remotely piloted aircraft have now carried out over 1,200 airstrikes against Daesh, second only to the United States in numbers of Coalition strikes.

In Syria, where the picture is more complicated, the Defence Secretary confirmed that by spring the operation to isolate Raqqa, the last major city Daesh holds in Syria, would be complete. It is expected that thereafter the liberation of the city itself will begin.

As the fight against Daesh enters a new phase, Ministers reviewed Coalition requests to make the training effort more flexible. The Defence Secretary last month authorised UK personnel to deliver training at secured and protected locations in Iraq, in addition to the training sites at Taji, Al Asad, Besmayah and Irbil, where personnel are already deployed. By training forward Britain will now deliver the infantry skills, counter-IED, combat first aid and bridge-building training where Iraqi forces need it. British forces previously mentored Iraqi forces carrying out bridge building ahead of the liberation of eastern Mosul.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Daesh is losing ground, fighters, and funding. Now we need to keep up the pressure on Mosul and Raqqa to deal Daesh a decisive blow. Britain will continue playing its leading role providing vital intelligence, precision airstrikes, and training Iraqi forces where they need it.

The meeting of Coalition Defence Ministers took place following discussions the day before on what more NATO would do to protect its southern borders. Sir Michael confirmed that Britain will send a UK military officer to help lead NATO's newly established training and capacity building mission in Iraq. This effort will help Iraqis defeat Daesh with training including in countering explosive devices. This commitment builds on the work that Britain is already doing in the country, where, we are helping to train Iraqi forces at an unprecedented level, with over 3,000 being trained a month.

Read more about UK activity against Daesh [here](#)

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Mackay was warned about business rates crisis – and did nothing

- [Home](#)
- [All News](#)
- Mackay was warned about business rates crisis – and did nothing

16 Feb 2017



The SNP government was warned about business rates increases last year – but did nothing to help.

Leading business groups wrote to finance secretary Derek Mackay as early as October 2016 spelling out the damaging impact the revaluation would have on hotels, pubs and businesses in Scotland.

The British Hospitality Association said it would have a “severe impact” and “likely lead to an increase in rateable values, and rates payable, by hotels of between 30 and 50 per cent”.

And in November, the Scottish Retail Consortium warned a Holyrood committee: “It will be very difficult to absorb some of the potential costs.”

Cosla even offered to help the Scottish Government do some modelling work on the rates rise, an offer it said “has not been taken up”.

However, the SNP’s response was to insist the revaluation had nothing to do with the Scottish Government – and is still refusing to act in order to help.

The Scottish Conservatives are today repeating their call for Mr Mackay to make a statement to Holyrood next week, and to order an immediate review of the revaluation before it comes into effect.

The party has also slammed Mr Mackay’s comments in the press this morning, when he insisted it was for councils, not central government, to respond.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Business groups were warning about the impact of this revaluation last year.

“Yet, from the very start, the SNP’s response has been to pass the buck and insist it is nothing to do with them.

“It is a complete abdication of responsibility.

“Once again, we see a Scottish Government so obsessed with its campaign for

independence that it has fallen asleep at the wheel on the issues that actually matter to people.

“Derek Mackay this morning has once again washed his hands of the matter and declared that it is for councils to act.

“This is from the man who has an extra £500m to spend next year, and who found nearly £200m down the back of the sofa two weeks ago in order to do a deal with the Greens.

“Mr Mackay should come before parliament to set out a clear statement that he will review this revaluation process before it is too late for firms which face going to the wall.

“Anything else will show that this SNP government has lost touch entirely with a crisis it knew was coming – but ignored.”

The SNP government was repeatedly warned by business groups about the crisis, most prominently by the British Hospitality Association.

British Hospitality Association

‘The 2017 rates revaluation in Scotland is likely to lead to an increase in rateable values, and rates payable, by hotels of between 30-50%. BHA has challenged this with the Assessors and has made known to the Scottish Government its concern over the impact of this on the profitability and sustainability of hotel businesses’ (*British Hospitality Association*, 18 October 2016, [link](#)).

William Macleod, British Hospitality Association

‘BHA is concerned, from what is known about the impact on hospitality and hotel businesses of the potentially severe impact of the 2017 revaluation that TR is likely to be required in the hospitality sector to allow businesses to cope with significant (between 30-50%) increases in rates’ (*William Macleod, British Hospitality Association – Consultation Response: 2017 Non-domestic rating revaluation – consultation on possible transitional arrangements*, [link](#))

Councillor Keenan COSLA

‘More than a year ago, we made an offer to the Government that we would do modelling work on business rates, because we realise that there would need to be some equalising factor across areas, as some industrial areas can raise much more. We would look to do that work but, because that opportunity has not been taken up, we are probably a year or so behind where we could be. If that joint work was going on, we would have an indication of where the figures are.’ (Local Government and Communities Committee Official Report, 28 September 2016, [link](#)).

David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium

‘Committee members will know some of our gripes about business rates, the large business supplement and the apprenticeship levy—I have a large list that I can bore the committee with at a later date, if you like. There will be some genuine challenges if retailers are to absorb some of those costs, so they will be looking for sharper deals with suppliers to see whether they can get a better price. They will also be shopping around, just as we advocate that consumers do, to see whether they can get the same quality of produce at better prices. As I said, it will be very difficult to absorb some of the potential costs, but it will be difficult to pass them on to consumers, given the current climate and the stiff competition out there.’ (Official Report, *Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 24 November 2016, p18, [link](#))

Scottish Retail Consortium

‘It is far from clear why firms operating in Scotland should pay more in rates than firms in comparable premises elsewhere in the UK, particularly when many have options over where to invest elsewhere in the UK or indeed abroad. Next year’s rise in the headline poundage rate for all other firms should also be shelved. After all, stimulating business investment is more difficult when costs are rising as it means diverting cash and resources away from growing the business. The SRC supports the principle behind the new local discretionary rates relief in the interim period prior to fundamental rates reform. It is a welcome acknowledgement of the need to keep down costs for business. However, we remain to be convinced that its use by councils will either be widespread or substantive enough to be effective’ (Scottish Retail Consortium, *retail industry recommendations for the Scottish Government for its Budget & Spending review* 1 August 2016, p6, [link](#))

Corporate report: Dredged Material Disposal Site Monitoring Round Coast of England

This report presents the scientific findings of, and implications for subsequent monitoring based on the results from dredged material disposal site monitoring conducted under a Cefas/Marine Management Organisation Service Level Agreement (SLA 1.3) project (C6794 hereafter) round the coast of England during 2015-16, together with those obtained following the processing of biological and sediment contaminant samples acquired during 2014.

The main aims of this report are: to aid the dissemination of the monitoring results; to assess whether observed changes resulting from dredged material disposal are in line with those expected; to compare the results with those

of previous years (where possible); and, to facilitate our improved understanding of the impacts of dredged material disposal at both a site-specific and a national (i.e. non site-specific) level.