

The George Cross awarded to the National Health Services of the United Kingdom

Press release

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The National Health Services of the United Kingdom have been awarded the George Cross by Her Majesty The Queen. The award comes in recognition of 73 years of dedicated service, including for the courageous efforts of healthcare workers across the country battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The George Cross – the highest civilian gallantry award, equivalent to the Victoria Cross – has only been bestowed collectively twice before, and today marks the second time it has been awarded collectively by Queen Elizabeth II.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

“We wouldn’t be where we are today without our health services. NHS staff have cared for us and our friends and family on the frontline of a pandemic for over a year, and I have witnessed their courage first-hand.

“Thanks to their devotion and duty our NHS has saved countless lives, and the George Cross is a symbol of the nation’s gratitude. I know the whole of the UK is behind me in paying tribute and giving thanks for everything the NHS has done for us not only in the last year, but since its inception.”

The George Cross was first bestowed collectively to the people of Malta on 15 April 1942 by King George VI and was granted to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (the fore-runner of the Police Service of Northern Ireland) on 23 November 1999.

The George Cross is the UK’s highest civilian gallantry award, equivalent to the military Victoria Cross. It sits at the top of the UK’s honours system, jointly with the Victoria Cross. It is given for acts of the greatest heroism

or of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger. The George Cross was instituted in 1940.

Notes

- The people of Malta were collectively given this honour in recognition of their continuing and heroic struggle against repeated and continuous attacks during the Second World War, while the RUC's award was for the collective and sustained bravery of police officers and their families.

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