

Exceptional courts and tribunals staff recognised with Palace gongs

Two of our colleagues have received awards in this year's New Year Honours for their work to rapidly bring in new ways of working at the start of the pandemic.

Two more of our people have been honoured for their outstanding contribution to other areas.

HMCTS Acting Chief Executive, Kevin Sadler said:

All four of our staff receiving awards from the Queen really are a credit to HMCTS. I was thrilled to hear they had been recognised in this way and they should all be proud of this tremendous achievement.

I'm proud of all the people within HMCTS and I know that this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the exceptional talent, experience and ingenuity across our organisation.

I was especially pleased to see recognition for the way in which our staff have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. I know how much effort has gone in from people across HMCTS to keep courts and tribunals running since last March – that work has been formally recognised with these honours.

Online services in the family court

For her work in the family court during the pandemic, Jurisdictional and Operational Support Manager Rebecca Cobbin has been awarded an OBE.

Rebecca, who has worked in courts for 33 years, and her team promoted an online process that made it easier for parents to make child arrangements. They also created guidance on how to prioritise injunction applications, when cases of domestic abuse started to rise during the first lockdown.

But in Rebecca's words, this isn't unusual and many of her colleagues are going above and beyond for court users.

Remote hearings in tribunals

Meanwhile, for his work in Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) tribunals, Delivery Manager Jason Greenwood, who is based in Darlington, has been recognised with an MBE.

Jason used knowledge of cloud video platform (CVP) to allow more remote hearings to take place at the start of the pandemic. Not only did this result in no hearing cancellations, but Jason's team believe they've been able to hear more cases than if all hearings were held in person.

Jason, who has worked in the tribunal for nearly 20 years, said:

Even though it was awarded to me, it's really for the whole team, the judiciary and the service users.

Health and wellbeing champion

For her efforts to improve her colleagues' health and wellbeing, Family Legal Team Manager Tracy Etienne has been awarded an MBE.

Tracy, who works in the Cheshire and Merseyside region and was previously based in Wales, has been a qualified fitness instructor for more than 20 years.

She used those skills to launch many initiatives including producing exercise guidance and videos for colleagues. She has also raised more than £3,000 for a hospice by running fitness classes for colleagues in return for a donation.

Tracy said:

My mum was so excited when I told her that she spent the whole day on the phone to her friends to tell her.

Mum was part of the Windrush generation, and I'm the first person in our family to even go to university, let alone receive an MBE!

Charity fundraiser

Finally, Ann Gumery has received a British Empire Medal for raising money for charity through a series of tough treks and climbs.

For the past 20 years, Ann has completed challenges including trekking 100km across the Sahara, and again in Jordan, climbed Kilimanjaro twice, completed the Inca Trail and walked the length of Hadrian's Wall.

These efforts were prompted, back in 2001, when Ann saw a corporate video from Macmillan Cancer Care. It struck a chord with her as she had lost her four-year-old son, David, to cancer in 1983.

In 2019, in celebration of her sixtieth birthday and what would have been David's fortieth birthday, she and her family trekked 40 km across the Malvern hills in Worcestershire, raising money for Birmingham Children's

Hospital, which had cared for David.

Foreign Secretary press conference – Cyprus – 4 February 2021

Thank you very much. It's a huge pleasure to be here. Both to renew the connections and friendship we have between the UK and Cyprus, but also -given the upcoming talks- to help make progress to support our friends here in Cyprus.

I want to thank the President of the Republic, Mr Anastasiades, and also you Foreign Minister for your friendship, your hospitality, and for the constructive discussions that we had today.

I also look forward to meeting Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar, later this afternoon.

The UK-Cyprus relationship is strong. We have a lot of history, a lot of water under the bridge in our relationship. We have shared values, shared legal systems, joint membership of the Commonwealth, and a very big web of people-to-people relations, including students – we talked a bit about that as well today.

We have got great partnerships and a network of personal relations, particularly in education, science, research, and security, all of which serve our joint interests and contribute to our friendship.

We want to continue strengthening those links and we want to reinforce and nurture these relations, and perhaps widen them as well.

So we will continue to work together to uphold the values that we both share and deal with the challenges we both face, whether that is including tackling Covid, climate change and regional challenges.

You can count on our friendship, you can count on our support and you can count on us on playing an active and full role.

And we also want to play a supporting role in helping the people of Cyprus, both sides of this dispute, to move things forward, to break the deadlock, to find a settlement that works in everyone's interest.

We are a problem solving nation by instinct, we are a Guarantor Power, we are a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

But above all, the UK feels we are also a long standing friend of the Cypriot people across the island.

So we want to see a permanent, enduring and lasting end to the dispute.

And I hope that all parties should seize the opportunities that the 5+1 talks present to really change the conversation and give the children, the young people of the island, the brightest prospects for the future in years ahead.

I think it's an opportunity to push for a Settlement which will benefit both sides but also have a premium dividend, if you like, for regional stability, security and prosperity.

I think a failure to reach a settlement after so many efforts will benefit no-one.

So again, I urge all sides to come to the talks with a willingness to demonstrate flexibility and compromise and I was very heartened by my conversations at the scope for that.

We will work with the Cypriot people and the UN of course, to finally resolve the Cyprus problem and achieve a just and lasting settlement.

So that, again, the young people, the next generation of Cypriots, can fulfil their aspirations, their dreams and evade their fears and anxieties that appear in both communities.

A reunited, Cyprus can achieve its full potential as a beacon of democracy, stability, prosperity and, frankly, the underlying values that Nicos and I, that Brits and Cypriots share.

Thank you very much again for your very warm welcome.

[The jury's out on River Ouseburn future](#)

An innovative project to involve communities in decisions about the future of their local river has taken place in the North East.

The first of its kind in the country, Ouseburn Citizens' Jury is made up of members of the public and looked at what a 'thoroughly modern river' should be.

The jury, which took place at the end of January and was run by an independent facilitator on behalf of the Environment Agency, debated local issues, shared ideas and questioned environmental experts on all aspects of the water environment.

The findings from the jury will help inform the Environment Agency's future water management plans. And as a direct result of the project, the

Environment Agency and Northumbrian Water are developing a potential bid to Ofwat's Innovation Fund to help finance an innovative partnership led through education in the local area.

The River Ouseburn

Clean and plentiful water

Catherine Saxon, Area Director of the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

Protecting and improving England's rivers, lakes and streams is essential to ensuring we have clean and plentiful water now and in the future.

We are facing some tough challenges, particularly from climate change and population growth. We need to work with everyone who uses, and is responsible for, water, across all sectors of society, to ensure the needs of all are reflected in our future plans.

Citizens' juries are an excellent way of gaining views from the wider public and we greatly value the input of everyone who has taken part.

The Ouseburn jury listened to evidence from a broad range of environmental experts, including Northumbrian Water, Woolsington Parish Council, the National Farmers' Union, Newcastle City Council and the Tyne Rivers' Trust.

The final six recommendations from the Ouseburn Citizens' Jury include better education, appropriate and fair legislation and incentives for behaviour change, improved funding for improvements, more action to manage pollution, a co-ordinated partnership approach to changes, and a better balance between development and wildlife.

Rob Carr, from the Environment Agency in the North East, attended the jury. He said:

This was a great way to connect with the Ouseburn community and seek their recommendations, which we hope to turn in to actions, improving the environment for people and nature.

Mike Madine, Head of Wastewater Service Planning, Quality and Performance at Northumbrian Water, added:

The citizens' jury was a fantastic event and it gave us the opportunity to see how our communities feel about our ambitious plans to improve the water environment.

During the discussions, it became clear that our communities have clear support for many of our current initiatives, including projects such as Bin The Wipe, our pollution reduction plans and our Water Environment Improvement Programme.

Already 33 of our 34 bathing waters have been highly rated as “excellent” or “good”, but our ambition is to have the best beaches and rivers in the country. Through events such as this we can engage with our communities to help meet our goals.

We are grateful for the Environment Agency for allowing us to be a part of this country-first experience.

Jury member Emily said she learned a lot during the experience, adding that she enjoyed ‘potentially making a difference to the local area’ and learning that ‘water is so much more than just for cleaning and drinking – there are many aspects of water that are overlooked’.

Further citizens’ juries will take place elsewhere in the country up until the end of March.

[UK and Albania sign Agreement to deepen economic relationship and political efforts to tackle serious organised crime](#)

Press release

Her Majesty’s Ambassador to Albania Duncan Norman signed the Agreement with Minister for Foreign Affairs Olta Xhaçka in Tirana.



The UK and Albania will do more together to tackle organised crime and stop it spreading throughout Europe, including to the UK, following a new Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement between our countries. The Agreement signed today (5 February) sets out the UK and Albania's ambitions for our future relationship including the strengthening of political, economic, security and cultural ties. As well as deepening our shared work against organised crime, the Agreement will allow for more cooperation on good governance and political cooperation – improving the security of the Western Balkans to make both Albania and the UK safer.

By signing the Agreement, the UK has reaffirmed its commitment to a close relationship with Albania and to playing a continued positive role in the Western Balkans.

The Agreement will also allow the UK and Albania to build on their trading relationship going forward. The preferential trading terms it secures will enable British business to trade as they did before 1 January 2021. Total trade in goods and services between the UK and Albania was worth £158m in 2019. The Agreement also paves the way for increased trade and investment in the future.

FCDO Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas Wendy Morton said:

I welcome the signing of the UK – Albania Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement which sets out our ambitious vision for the future relationship between our countries. Together we will be building even stronger partnerships to tackle organised crime, improve governance, support justice reform and wider economic development.

The signing of this Agreement benefits exporters and consumers in both of our countries, including British businesses such as Vodafone, who are flourishing in Albania.

Minister for International Trade, Ranil Jayawardena MP, said:

Today's Agreement supports a trading relationship worth £158m in 2019 and provides the foundation for deeper trade and investment ties in the future, benefitting businesses and creating jobs in both our countries. I look forward to working in partnership as we continue to strengthen our bonds through trade.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Albania, Duncan Norman said:

The signing of this Agreement marks a significant and positive step forwards in the UK – Albania relationship. Albania offers great opportunities for UK companies and investors expanding into south-

east Europe and the signing of the Agreement marks a new era of increased investment in both our economies. Our Agreement also allows us to continue and build on our close cooperation across a wide range of areas, including the environment, energy, finance and education.

Notes to editors

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[New UK Government Covid testing site opens in Glasgow Pollok](#)

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