

First Minister announces St David Awards finalists

The St David Awards are the national awards of Wales, which recognise the extraordinary achievements and contributions of people in, or from, Wales and from all walks of life.

Announcing the finalists, the First Minister said:

“Being involved with the St David Awards for the first time, I was struck by the inspiring talent Wales has across so many different areas.

“These awards are a celebration, acknowledging some amazing and remarkable people. Each of the finalists have made a significant difference – overcoming adversity and achieving something truly inspirational.

“All of our St David Awards finalists are exceptional – every person and organisation is a credit to our nation. I look forward to celebrating their achievements at the awards ceremony on 21st March.”

The award categories are: Bravery, Citizenship, Culture, Enterprise, Innovation, Science and Technology, International, Sport and Young Person.

The finalists are:

Bravery

Andrew Niinemae

Andrew risked his life trying to stop a car from driving into a crowd of around 20 people outside a pub in Whitchurch, Cardiff. He suffered serious injuries to his leg but his actions prevented other people from being seriously injured. Andrew acted on instinct and showed courageous behaviour to put others before himself. Witnesses say that without his intervention, there could have been many injuries and possible fatalities.

Ceri and Aaron Saunders

Ceri and Aaron gave no thought to their own safety when they saw someone in trouble in the sea on the Gower Peninsula. The pair were spending the weekend on a camping trip in the area and while out for a walk, the mother and son saved a 10-year-old boy from being swept out to sea near Broughton Bay. The RNLI said the situation was very dangerous and the boy was lucky that Ceri and Aaron took action and helped save his life.

Darran Kilay

Darran put himself in a dangerous and potentially life-threatening situation to support police officers when a man approached him and a co-worker waving a knife. He quickly informed police officers and then followed the man as he ran away. Following the chase, the police were able to detain the knifeman. Darran was praised by a judge at the subsequent trial and commended for his brave actions – he said he was just doing his job.

Citizenship

Cardiff Street Pastors

Cardiff Street Pastors is an initiative involving 25 local churches. Trained volunteers patrol Cardiff city centre on Friday and Saturday nights to help those in need. The team of more than 60 street pastors work with South Wales Police, Cardiff Council, Cardiff University, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and local businesses and has volunteered thousands of hours of service to Cardiff's night-time economy.

Emma Picton-Jones

Emma set up the DPJ Foundation in 2016 after her husband Daniel, an agricultural contractor, took his own life due to struggles with his mental health. The charity helps people in the rural community with mental health problems, especially men in the agricultural sector. Emma speaks at agricultural events to raise awareness of the foundation's work to support other businesses, which may then recognise the signs of mental health struggles among their customers. Emma has raised around £75,000 to support the foundation's work.

Glenys Evans

Glenys is one of the founding parents of Bobath Children's Therapy Centre Wales, which provides specialist therapy to children diagnosed with cerebral palsy and support to their families. Her son Thomas has cerebral palsy and Glenys was frustrated by having to travel to London to access specialist therapy. Together with a few other parents, she helped set up and open Bobath in 1992. To mark Bobath's 20th anniversary, Glenys undertook a 100km Sahara Trek and raised £20,000 for the charity.

Janet Rogers MBE

Janet is a volunteer and member representative on the Board of Trustees at the Ponthafren Association. The charity was set up in 1992 to provide a range of mental health support services in North Powys and Janet was a trustee for 9 years. Janet is responsible for looking after Ponthafren's community garden in Newtown and she has shared her own experiences of mental health with other organisations in Wales to help them make positive differences to people's lives.

Culture

Elfed Roberts

Until his retirement in August, Elfed was the chief executive of the National Eisteddfod, a post he held for 25 years. Under Elfed's leadership, the Eisteddfod developed significantly, offering new opportunities for visitors to the festival. Elfed ensured the Welsh language and Welsh heritage were central during the Eisteddfod's development. Elfed's final Eisteddfod typified what he achieved over the past 25 years – relevancy to contemporary life in Wales and attracting thousands of Welsh speakers, non-Welsh speakers and learners annually.

Fiona Stewart

Fiona is the CEO and owner of the annual Green Man Festival, which started in 2003. It is the largest contemporary arts and science festival in Wales, one of remaining large independent UK music festivals, and it is held in the Brecon Beacons. She is the only woman with controlling ownership of a large commercial UK festival and in a competitive market, Green Man sells out each year, attracting 25,000 people a day from around the world to Mid Wales. The Green Man Trust Charity was founded in 2013 and has supported 3,000 artists, trained 2,000 people, 200 science engagement projects and 27 Welsh community projects.

Hijinx Theatre Company

Hijinx is a pan-Wales theatre company which always casts neuro-divergent and learning disabled actors in its award-winning theatre productions. Hijinx uses theatre to tackle the complex social problems of integrating learning disability into the workplace and into society. It is driven by the ambition to reduce inequality and believes everyone should have the right to access a rich cultural education and lead a dynamic, creative life.

Theatr Clwyd

Tamara and Liam lead Wales' largest producing theatre. In the last 2 years, Theatr Clwyd has created 23 critically-acclaimed productions and more than 700,000 people have seen shows produced and presented by the organisation. Theatr Clwyd's many achievements over the past 24 months include the creation of a number of new community companies, engaging with a variety of age groups.

Enterprise

Hilltop Honey

Scott established Hilltop Honey in 2011 and since then the company has seen exceptional levels of growth with turnover increasing from £234,000 to more than £4 million. Hilltop Honey was the first company to go to market with an organic Fairtrade honey and now all of their products are available in reusable glass jars or 100% recyclable bottles. The company donates 25% of

its profits to a children's charity.

Jem Skelding

Jem is the CEO of Naissance, a company selling natural and organic health and beauty products. Based in Neath, the company has grown considerably and now employs 134 staff in the UK and Germany and produces more than 1,000 products. Jem has built partnerships with sustainable and ethical growers around the world, sourcing the finest quality raw materials and ensuring that growers receive the best price for their products. One example of this is a cooperative of women in Ghana where 600 women support a community of more than 2,400 individuals.

Steve Downey

Steve is the business owner of Hannaman Material Handling, in Deeside. The company specialises in providing full 360 material handling solutions to its customers by supplying and servicing forklift trucks, access platforms, fleet management systems, operator training and industrial floor care equipment. Following a career in the armed forces, Steve bought the company in 2013 and has turned it into a modern, effective and profitable business with a growing reputation for the supply of quality products and excellent service support.

International

Dr Laith al-Rubaiy

Dr Al-Rubaiy is a gastroenterologist from Cardiff. After graduating from the Basra School of Medicine in Iraq, he came to the UK in 2005. Having only visited his homeland on a number of occasions during his time in Wales, he decided to volunteer with the AMAR Foundation to provide medical treatments to some of Iraq's poorest citizens. As well as helping to set up a mobile clinic, Dr Al-Rubaiy, is a clinical lecturer at Swansea University's School of Medicine.

Liam Rahman

From Carmarthenshire, Liam studied at Yale-NUS College (Singapore) and Yale University (USA), majoring in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Returning to Wales in 2017, Liam became the Director of E-Qual Education, a company he co-founded in 2011 and now employs more than 100 people in Wales. Liam is an avid supporter of the Seren Network, the Welsh Government's flagship initiative to assist pupils to gain places in top universities, for which he mentors students and guides schools to learn more about international opportunities.

Rhinal Patel

Rhinal, who grew up in Pontypridd, gave up a high-profile career working with A-list celebrities to travel the world and help people less fortunate than herself. After donating all her travel budget to slum children in India, she travelled home to Wales with no money. She has now set up a charity called the Pursuit of Happiness, through which she gives workshops on human rights

in partnership with international organisations like Amnesty International, looking after the environment and mindfulness.

Innovation, Science and Technology

Cerebra Innovation Centre

Cerebra is a charity dedicated to helping families with children with brain conditions discover a better life together. It has established a partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David to establish the Cerebra Innovation Centre (CIC). Based at the Swansea College of Art, a team of engineers design and build innovative, bespoke products to help disabled children to discover the world around them. Their designs are exciting as well as functional, promoting social inclusion and peer acceptance for the children they help. Products and advice are provided free of charge.

Go Safe Cymru

GoSafe Cymru is a partnership between Wales' police forces, the 22 local authorities and the Welsh Government with the aim of making Welsh roads safer for everyone by influencing the attitudes and behaviours of all road users. With dashcams becoming more popular and an increase in helmet cameras, there has been a large increase in video evidence being sent to Wales' police forces. The GoSafe website enables the public to upload their video evidence and complete a statement about the offence they have witnessed. It receives 200 submissions each month.

Ian Bond

Ian, a retired businessman from Aberdare, has used his chronic and life-limiting condition to build a successful business offering digital health solutions. With business partner Dave Taylor, he set up Bond Digital Health Ltd in Cardiff and worked with local universities to create a smart diary and app platform to help patients with chronic conditions to monitor their health. Mr Bond is also working in collaboration with Hywel Dda University Health Board to help develop an electronic diary app that will help COPD patients self-manage their condition.

Sport

Geraint Thomas OBE

2018 was an amazing year for cyclist Geraint, who won the iconic Tour de France road race last summer. He became the first Welshman to win the event and only the third British rider after Sir Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome. His achievement was celebrated at a homecoming event in Cardiff with more than 10,000 people present to congratulate him on his achievement and the National Velodrome of Wales in Newport was renamed the Geraint Thomas Velodrome.

Jess Fishlock MBE

Jess has been a member of Wales Women's national football team since 2006. In 2017, Jess became the first Welsh player (woman or man) to earn 100 caps. She's also won the Welsh Footballer of the Year title times. Jess has appeared 113 times for the Wales team and scored 29 goals. She was a key part of the squad in its attempt to qualify for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup, playing in every game despite the intense travel commitments. She is currently on loan to Olympique Lyonnais in France from Seattle Reign FC in the USA.

Menna Fitzpatrick MBE

At just 19 years old, Menna Fitzpatrick became the most successful British winter sport Paralympian in history at the 2018 games. Menna is visually impaired, having only 5% vision, and along with her guide Jennifer Kehoe, won a bronze, 2 silvers and a gold in the Pyeongchang Paralympics. She carried the flag for Team GB at the closing ceremony of the games and at the end of January this year, Menna and Jennifer won 2 gold medals at the Para Alpine Skiing Championships in Italy. Menna became the youngest person on the recent Queen's birthday honours list, receiving an MBE for her service to sport.

Young Person

Bethan Owen

Bethan is currently a sixth form pupil but from a young age she has been helping her father to care for her mother who has epilepsy. When she was 6, Bethan was introduced to karate to give her a focus away from her responsibilities at home. By the age of 12, Bethan was a black belt and a qualified karate instructor. Once qualified, Bethan opened her first not-for-profit karate club for other young carers between the ages of 6 and 9. The club supports them to develop confidence, self-esteem and have a break from their caring responsibilities.

Hannah Adams

17-year old Hannah is an anti-bullying campaigner from Cardiff and uses her own experience of being bullied to help others. At 7, Hannah moved from London to Cardiff. Following the move, Hannah was bullied for years at school and online. At 13, she took the first step by confiding in her mum about the bullying. She received counselling and after her complaints were ignored by teachers, she decided to move schools. She is now an outgoing young woman, happy at her new school where she has many friends and supportive teachers. Hannah is an anti-bullying ambassador for the Diana Awards and she speaks to others her age to encourage them to speak up and not suffer.

Lowri Hawkins

Lowri is a survivor of child sexual exploitation and has been incredibly brave in going public about what happened to her. She provided evidence against her abuser, resulting in his conviction and imprisonment. While the

offences committed against her and the subsequent criminal justice process had a significant impact on her health and wellbeing, she has volunteered to support agencies to improve their response to child sexual exploitation. Lowri has given up a considerable amount of her time to engage with practitioners, senior leaders and the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner to provide feedback about how policing and other services could improve the service delivered to children. Lowri is currently studying a course in social care as she is committed to helping protect vulnerable children.

Newtown bypass to be officially opened ahead of schedule

Construction of the bypass began in February 2016 and traffic will be allowed to travel on the road for the first time following the official opening.

The development to the south of Newtown is approximately 6.3km long and has two lanes in one direction and one lane in the opposite direction to provide safe overtaking sections of the road.

The Newtown bypass will ease traffic congestion through the town centre by between 40 and 50 per cent resulting in reduced journey times in the area and better access to jobs and services. It will also improve safety by removing the need for large high sided heavy goods and agricultural vehicles from travelling through nearby residential areas.

A strong emphasis has been placed on investing in Welsh businesses during the construction phase with £46.8 million being spent on goods, services, or overheads from companies in Wales.

In addition, £10.7 million has been spent on employing people, including apprentices, living in Wales as a result of the scheme.

Alun Griffiths contractors who built the bypass have provided local employment and training opportunities in partnership with Coleg Powys through the Skills Academy Programme. This has resulted in 18 apprentices and graduate trainees gaining valuable skills and experience by working on the bypass.

Active travel provisions have also been included as part of the bypass including a link from Newtown to the Mochdre Industrial Estate.

Ahead of the official opening, Economy and Transport Minister Ken Skates said:

“I am delighted to officially open what is a significant

development in Mid Wales.

The Newtown Bypass has been delivered ahead of schedule and completed to the very highest standard. The scheme improves north-south and east-west links and will provide a real step change in how people travel in the area, as well as to and beyond Newtown.

The amount of traffic passing through the town will reduce as a result of the development leading to shorter journey times and improved air quality in the area.

The new bypass will strengthen the local economy by making it easier and better for people to access jobs and services and businesses will benefit too as the new route makes it simpler to import and export goods. It also provides improved links to tourist destinations which will be a boost for the industry.

I have been impressed with the role apprentices and graduate trainees have had working on the construction of the bypass. I'd like to congratulate them, Alun Griffiths and everyone who has worked on delivering this excellent feat of engineering.

I'm also very pleased with the level of community engagement and projects that have been delivered as a result of the project. From fundraising for charities to educational link programmes such as visits to schools, this scheme has had a real community element to it.

The Newtown Bypass is an absolutely fantastic example of how Welsh Government investment and commitment is delivering for the benefit of residents in Mid Wales."

Minister celebrates enhancement of MyTravelPass young persons' discount scheme

The scheme, which has evolved and improved since its pilot in 2015, now offers a third off the fares for all journeys taken by young people aged between 16 and 21 – right up until their 22nd birthday.

Transport Minister Ken Skates said:

"I am delighted to be welcoming this enhancement of the MyTravelPass scheme, which will allow more young people to take

advantage of discounted journeys.

“The scheme has proved popular. The success of this idea since its conception in 2014 through to its expansion now, can be charted in the number of passes that have been issued.

“By last August, there were 14,939 live passes in circulation. Since the scheme began, there has been a total of 20,953 pass-holders, and there were an estimated 1.344m discounted journeys in 2017-18.

“Encouraging more young people to use the bus for more of their journeys will have an immediate and long-term benefit by reducing road congestion, improving air quality and making the bus network a more attractive place for the bus industry to invest.

“Also, attracting more young people onto public transport is vital if we are to achieve a sustainable public transport network that supports our Prosperity for All objectives.

“We will continue to work closely with the bus industry and our local authority partners to achieve a sustainable bus network, which is key to achieving our objectives for a socially-responsible, greener and prosperous Wales.”

Go to the [MyTravelPass](#) website for more information and to apply.

Young care leavers to be exempt from paying council tax

The plan to take forward regulations to exempt care leavers under 25 from paying council tax is set out as responses to a consultation with local authorities, voluntary organisations, taxpayers and care leavers themselves are published.

The feedback to the consultation has been very positive, with 91% of respondents supporting the proposal to provide this additional help to care leavers and 80% agreeing the exemption should be extended to the age of 25.

The principle of exempting care leavers from paying council tax has been widely accepted for some time, but the level of support available to care leavers across Wales has been inconsistent.

The new legislation is the latest in a series of measures designed to make council tax fairer in Wales – a key Welsh Government commitment.

Finance Minister Rebecca Evans said:

“I am keen the Welsh Government and local authorities do everything possible to support care leavers and support their successful transition into adulthood and independent living.

“Today’s announcement is another positive step in our pledge to make council tax fairer and I want to thank everyone who took part in the consultation.”

As council tax bills start to arrive through the letterboxes of homes across Wales, the Finance Minister is urging people to check if they are entitled to help paying their bill.

The minister added:

“There are many discounts, reductions and exemptions available and I would encourage everyone to check the Welsh Government website to see if they could be paying less council tax.”

[More information about the support on GOV.WALES](#)

The regulations to exempt care leavers from paying council tax will be laid before the National Assembly in early March.

New support for previous recipients of the Welsh Independent Living Grant

An independent social work assessment will be offered to all former Independent Living Fund (ILF) recipients who are unhappy with their new care and support package and would like a second opinion.

The Welsh Government will provide additional funding to local authorities for the cost of the workers to carry out these independent assessments and additional care hours that may result from the assessments.

The independent assessments will be consistent with people’s agreed wellbeing outcome and acknowledge the historical entitlement of former ILF recipients.

Mrs Morgan said:

“It is paramount that people’s ability to live independently is not

compromised by changes the care and support provided for people previously in receipt of the Welsh Independent Living Grant. These changes will ensure that is the case and deliver a consistent level of care and support across Wales.

“While the majority of former ILF recipients are receiving the same or more care as they were previously, a significant number have experienced a reduction in hours of support. There is also considerable variation in the reductions in support.

“I have therefore written to local government leaders to request a pause of the transition with immediate effect in order to bring in the revised arrangements.

“This is a significant change of approach that ensures that the needs of former WILG recipients will be fully met, and that resources are no barrier to a full package of care and support.

I would like to thank Nathan Davies and his colleagues in the Save the WILG Campaign for the representations they have made to Welsh Government on this matter. I have met with Nathan twice in the last three weeks to hear his concerns and to seek to develop a new approach. I understand that Nathan is supportive in principle of the new approach Welsh Government intend to take. We share a common interest in seeing it implemented properly.”