

## Queen's Awards for Enterprise 2015: A boost to business

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The Queen's Awards for Enterprise, the UK's highest official accolades for business success, are 50 years old this year. But their aims of promoting excellence and driving economic growth seem as relevant as ever — particularly in the light of efforts to boost exports, a disappointing feature of the recovery.

This year's winners provide plentiful evidence of businesses' ability to innovate and sell their wares around the world: if only more can be persuaded to show similar ambition. The winners also display great variety, ranging from a satellite operator to language schools; from makers of military parachutes and thermal-imaging cameras to producers of speciality cheeses; and from powerhouses such as carmaker Jaguar Land Rover, with 28,000 staff, to companies with as few as five employees.

The 2015 list, published to mark the Queen's birthday on April 21, contains 141 business awards that mix FTSE companies with private businesses and foreign-owned subsidiaries. Companies

report that winning these awards can help to gain introductions to new customers ahead of global competitors.

Awards are given for achievement in three categories: international trade, where this year there are 105 winners; innovation, with 24 awards; and sustainable development (benefiting the environment, society and the economy) with 12. There are also six enterprise promotion awards to individuals for efforts to encourage entrepreneurship.

The honours demonstrate the UK's strength in many sectors including engineering, software, life sciences, product design, food, fashion, tourism, recruitment and higher education. Almost a quarter of entrants won an award.

Winners range from large companies such as OCS Group, an international facilities services company, to smaller enterprises such as Lumishore, which makes underwater LED lighting systems for the marine leisure industry, Kiddimoto, a maker of wooden bikes for young children, and Seafast Logistics, which provides shipping services to dangerous parts of the world. All of these win international trade awards.

The accolade, originally known as the Queen's Award to Industry, was instituted by royal warrant in 1965. The format has since widened to reflect a changed business landscape, yet the original aim of boosting exports and encouraging technological advance is still important.

Export growth remains elusive, however, despite ministerial missions to countries such as China, India and Brazil and greater support for businesses.

George Osborne, the chancellor, is little nearer to his target of doubling annual exports to £1tn by 2020 than he was when he announced it three years ago. The Office for Budget Responsibility expects exports to grow by more than 4 per cent a year over the next four years, but that would raise them only to £636bn by 2020.

The pound's strength against the Euro and the Eurozone's weakness are among factors that have held exports back, though some economists also blame a lack of business confidence to explore new markets.

The Queen's Awards list contains many experienced exporters but also a few that have only lately taken the plunge. Pumphtronics, which makes fuel-dispensing equipment for service stations, has traded for 18 years but only recently started selling overseas. The judges said it had put "great effort into learning about the idiosyncrasies of exporting".

The core of the awards remains the dozens of smaller companies for which they provide important recognition. Seventeen of the winners have 10 employees or fewer, while 116 have fewer than 250 employees.

Two small companies — Wavestore, which supplies video management software enabling surveillance of many sites, and Hallmarq Veterinary Imaging, which makes MRI scanners for the veterinary market — achieved double recognition, receiving awards for both innovation and international trade.

Manufacturing still provides many international trade winners, including Brompton Bicycle, the folding cycle maker; Hotter shoemakers; Acro Aircraft Seating, which manufactures passenger seats for economy aeroplane cabins; and Vita Liberata, which makes organic self-tanning products.

Services are also represented among the award winners, including the Wine and Spirit Education Trust, which provides qualifications in the drinks industry; Mood International, a software specialist in business performance management; Pell Frischmann Consulting Engineers and Rabbie's Trail Burners, a Scottish travel company.

The fields of science and technology invariably furnish much success. This year's international trade winners include Sub10 Systems, which delivers broadband using millimetre wave wireless frequencies; Ultrasonic Sciences, which manufactures testing systems; and Markes International, which makes scientific equipment for extracting ultra-low levels of organic chemicals from gases, liquids and solids.

Winners in the innovation category are diverse. They include Accesso Technology Group, which devised a virtual queueing system to enhance visitor experiences at theme parks and sporting events; Tamper Technologies, which supplies tamper-evident security labels and tapes; and Contra Vision, which makes see-through graphic products commonly deployed as advertisement displays on glass surfaces.

The sustainable development winners are varied too, and include carmaker Jaguar Land Rover, for reducing the environmental impact of its products and operations.

Among the other recipients are Anglian Water, which achieved the lowest leak rate in the UK water industry, and the Wales Millennium Centre, for its education and community programmes such as exhibitions of artwork and creative writing from prisons and secure hospitals.

Winners of the Queen's Awards range from companies founded in the 19th century, such as Mackintosh, the raincoat maker, and The Tintometer Ltd, which makes colour measurement instruments, to recent enterprises such as Mediastation Creative Solutions, a provider of digital technology services trading as Smart Cookie, which started in 2011. All these companies win international trade awards.

FTSE 250 companies represented include Spirax-Sarco Engineering and Renishaw, winners in the innovation category. At the smaller end are enterprises such as Hartley & Tissier, which makes bespoke wool carpets, and HiBreeds International, an exporter of hatching eggs for the poultry industry, each of which have five employees. They have both won international trade awards. Foreign-owned winners include Holroyd Precision, a specialised machine toolmaker established in 1861 now owned by China's Chongqing Machinery & Electric Corporation; Nicobrand, a US-owned maker of ingredients for smoking cessation therapies; and the Indian-owned Jaguar Land Rover.