

"Celebrating Services for Witnesses"

NATIONAL AWARDS CEREMONY 2017

Nottingham Law School at Nottingham Trent University
Friday, 20th October 2017 (6:00-8:30pm)

OPENING ADDRESS

By the Hon. Mr Justice Haddon-Cave

Good evening and a very warm welcome to the inaugural National Awards Celebrating Services for Witnesses.

May I first of all express our sincere thanks and gratitude to the Pro-Vice Chancellor and the Dean of Nottingham Law School for their generosity in hosting us at here at Nottingham Trent University.

This is a unique event. It is the first time that national awards have been given in this country to honour those who help and support victims and witnesses in our courts; and from my researches, this would appear to be the first time that such a national award ceremony has taken place in any jurisdiction anywhere. So this may be a world first.

We have a very distinguished gathering here this evening. We are especially honoured by the presence of the Victim's Commissioner (Baroness Newlove), together with the CEO of HMCTS (Susan Ackland-Hood), a glittering array of judges including our distinguished Resident Judges of Nottingham and Derby (HHJ Dickinson QC and HHJ Shant QC), the Chief Magistrate (Emma Arbuthnot), the Vice-Chair elect of the Bar (Richard Atkins QC), the Director of Operations of the CAB (Michelle Shambrook), and a posse of High Sheriffs and Police and Crime Commissioners from the East Midlands. The presence of so many leading figures here this evening is witness to the importance that we now place upon the way in which victims and witnesses are looked after in our system of justice.

Going to court can be a daunting experience. I remember as a young barrister speaking in court for the first time. My Chambers Clerk told me all I had to do was so stand up and say "*I agree*" and then sit down. But I was up half the night practicing!

At the Bar, I had the privilege of representing many victims, including all the victims of the *Zeebrugge Disaster*, the *Marchioness Disaster* and the *Kegworth Aircrash*. This gave me a profound sense of the importance of the proper treatment of victims and witnesses in our legal system, particularly when they are having to recount terrible events in their lives.

As a Judge, I have sat in many trials where the jury, the advocates, the usher, the court clerk, the public gallery and the press have waited with baited breath for one person to speak – and it is not the judge. It is the victim or witness upon whose evidence the case turns.

I said in the introduction to the report of the Advocacy Training Council into Vulnerable Witnesses (2009-2011) "*Raising the Bar*", "*The manner in which the vulnerable are treated in our Court system is a mark of how civilised a society we are.*"

(<https://www.icca.ac.uk/images/word/raisingthebar.pdf>). These words apply with equal force to all victims and witnesses.

It is important that all victims of crime and witnesses are respected and supported through the ordeal of going to Court because our very justice system not only demands it but depends upon it.

It is important that all witnesses, whether for the prosecution or the defence, are properly looked after and supported so that they can give their best evidence whether by video link, behind a screen or in person in the witness box.

It is important so that our justice system maintains its reputation for being one of the fairest and most civilised in the world.

Extraordinary work is being done up and down the country, by individuals in their own time, by volunteers, by agencies across the board. Key is often teamwork and different individuals and agencies linking to form a seamless web of support at each stage of the court process.

This evening the prizes will be handed out to the winners from those who are lucky enough to have been nominated. But I would like to acknowledge the many unsung heroes and heroines, professionals and volunteers alike, up and down the country who do such good work day-in-day out supporting witnesses in a large variety of ways. I think they all deserve a round of applause don't you?

We intend that this will be an annual event – so if you haven't made the X-Factor nominations this year, there is every chance you will next year – and we might even get Simon Cowell on the panel. May I say a big thank you to my panel who have done the judging: Marios Leptos (Head of Citizens Advice Witness Service), Janine Smith (Chief Crown Prosecutor, East Midlands), Liz Olney (Deputy Director Customer Change and Innovation, HMCTS), Amanda Lowndes (Head of Crime, Midlands Region), Shaun Smith QC (Joint Head of No.1 Chambers).

There are a large number of people to thank for putting on this remarkable and unique event – including those at the many agencies who have worked together to get this show on the road. Thanks are due in particular to the organisations that generously supported these awards – HMCTS, CPS, British Transport Police, Defence Community, the Bar, Citizens Advice Witness Service, the comms and press teams for each of these organisations; and the HMCTS Victim and Witness Delivery Group who had the courage and vision to commission this event.

Finally, I would like to pay special tribute to Trudy Lewis, the Head of Midlands RSU, without whose drive and enthusiasm for this great project nothing would have been possible.

I would like next to introduce the Chief Executive of HMCTS, Susan Ackland-Hood, who would like to say a few words.

Press Notes:

Awards ceremony honours those who support victims and witnesses

Those who go above and beyond to help victims and witnesses through often traumatic court experience have been recognised at a national awards ceremony.

The inaugural 'Celebrating Services for Witnesses' awards ceremony, held in Nottingham on Friday 20th October 2017, honoured the people and agencies who spend their day to day lives supporting victims and witnesses to perform their invaluable role; for instance, a witness liaison officer in a court who makes sure the court is doing all it can to make the experience easier, a court operations manager who makes sure the waiting rooms for victims and witnesses are comfortable and reassuring, or a volunteer for the Witness Service charity who offer a source of emotional support and practical advice.

The awards ceremony was held at Nottingham Trent University, and was supported by the university's Law School, the Crown Prosecution Service, defence lawyers including members of the independent bar, the British Transport Police and the Citizens Advice Witness Service. The judging panel included representatives from each of these organisations, all of whom were impressed with the standard of nominations.

There were six award categories:

- **UNSUNG HERO AWARD (Individual)**
- **SPECIALIST SUPPORT AWARD (Team or Individual)**
- **FRONTLINE SERVICES AWARD (Individual)**
- **SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS AWARD (Team or Individual)**
- **PARTNERSHIP AWARD (Team)**
- **THE VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER'S AWARD (Team or Individual)**, presented by Baroness Helen Newlove, the Victim's Commissioner

The shortlist included the South Yorkshire Multi Agency Team, the Cambridge and Peterborough Rape Crisis Partnership Independent Sexual Violence Team, a CPS Project Team (Speaking to Witnesses at Court), a Legal Advisor, a Witness Service Volunteer and Victim First Northumbria.

The winners were:

- **WITNESS SERVICE VOLUNTEER (Unsung Hero Award)**
- **CLARE WALKER, DOMESTIC ABUSE CONSULTANT (Specialist Support Award)**
- **KAY BOLTON, HMCTS (Frontline Services Award)**
- **REGIONAL MANAGER, CENTRAL WITNESS SERVICE AND HEAD OF MIDLANDS REGIONAL SUPPORT UNIT, HMCTS (Significant Improvements Award)**

- **NOTTINGHAM MUSLIM WOMEN'S NETWORK (Partnership Award)**
- **ZEB JOHNSON, OPERATIONS MANAGER, LONDON, HMCTS (The Victims' Commissioner's Award)**

Susan Acland-Hood, HMCTS Chief Executive, said, *"I am delighted to have been at the first 'Celebrating Services for Witnesses' awards, to honour those who support some of the most vulnerable in the courts system. It's vital that we make sure victims and witnesses feel as comfortable and confident as possible, allowing them to give their best evidence and help to make sure justice is done."*

Mr Justice Haddon-Cave, Presiding Judge of the Midlands, said, *"These awards are a wonderful opportunity to thank, honour and encourage the many volunteers, professionals and agencies who do vital work in our courts up and down the country helping and supporting victims and witnesses."*

Professor Janine Griffiths-Baker, Dean of the Law School at Nottingham Trent University, said, *"We are delighted to have sponsored such a momentous event and to have hosted so many distinguished guests from across the justice sector. As a Law School which prides itself on playing an active role in the legal community, we recognise that the justice system only works when those who give evidence are provided with support from a wide range of agencies. The nominees for these awards have displayed enormous determination and innovation in championing the rights of witnesses."*

For more information on the Celebrating Services for Witnesses Awards 2017, please contact Trudy.lewis@justice.gov.uk