



A CASE STUDY: THE SCOTT PARTNERSHIP

Outstanding performance over a 3-year period

Background

This case study is a short summary of The Scott Partnership's successful entry in the International Trade category for 2024. It has been created to encourage Cheshire-based organisations to consider entering the prestigious King's Awards for Enterprise, in at least one of its four categories: International Trade, Innovation, Sustainable Development, and Promoting Opportunity (through social mobility).

A King's Award entry requires significant effort and planning, but the size of organisation is taken into account and there is good guidance available to support those going through the process for the first time. The judging is rigorous, and this further underlines the quality of these awards.

The Scott Partnership entered the 2024 King's Awards for the first time and were lucky enough to be successful. We put this down to our planning, effort and approach to the award entry process. We are hoping to illustrate the steps we took and give guidance herein.

Why did The Scott Partnership enter in 2024? We met the criteria! We knew having considered applying for many years, that the window of opportunity has to be taken when you see it. Hopefully you will learn some tips from us and we're happy to help you in your own applications for 2026, which open in summer 2025.



Katherine Darlington, CEO The Scott Partnership at The King's Award for Enterprise reception at Windsor Castle.

Context

The Scott Partnership is a global B2B marketing and PR agency, working in highly technical and scientific markets across the world. The company was founded in 1996 in Cheshire, and our first client led us into export quickly. We have been selling internationally ever since. There were two reasons for this: firstly it enabled us to de-risk our exposure to the UK economy, and operate in a less recessionary environment (pharma and life sciences are traditionally buoyant) and secondly, we discovered quickly that American clients had larger budgets (than their UK counterparts). We therefore embraced export clients.



What is the King's Award for Enterprise?

The Award programme, now in its 58th year, is the most prestigious business award in the country. Previously known as The Queen's Awards for Enterprise, but renamed to reflect His Majesty The King's desire to continue the legacy of HM Queen Elizabeth II by recognising outstanding UK businesses.

Meeting the criteria

The criteria for King's Award applicants are very strict. In terms of our business, we are a service provider, and therefore this really limits the Awards we can enter to either International Development (long-established focusing on Exports, and the most popular and therefore competitive category) or Promoting Opportunity (through Social Mobility).

The application form is clear and you can effectively only enter if you meet the criteria. Given the calibre of companies who apply, it is absolutely vital that any applicant takes it seriously and considers their best chances: in short many companies are eliminated before they apply because they do not meet the criteria. So familiarity with what is measured is the key starting point.

We knew that acceptance of our application would meet the base criteria, everyone who gets through that stage is deemed to be a valid entrant; but not every company makes it to the shortlist. In Cheshire for example in 2024, six companies were successful out of 30 applicants. Many companies apply several years before they receive the award.

We therefore knew that meeting the criteria is simply the starting point. The challenge was **how to stand out?**

Making a start

Preparation was a key first step to applying for the King's Award and to do this we took several approaches:

- We reviewed the form internally and went through all the questions to ensure we would be able to answer all the sections. We then prepared a draft dummy application with bullet point answers.
- We sought help externally by speaking with our ITA (International Trade Advisor) at the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) about guidance and advice.
- On this advice we found support available directly from the King's Award (KAE) team and DBT to advise and guide applicants through the process. This includes webinars, seminars, talks, presentations from award recipients etc.
- Once we knew the general approach needed, we audaciously asked our ITA if she knew any previous recipients who could help us.
- We were provided with a redacted application that showed how they had entered, what they had chosen to present, and the successful form. Clearly there was more in this than just facts. The narrative story arc was vital.
- During this time our CEO, Katherine Darlington was fortunate enough to be invited to become an Export Champion by the DBT. This role – held by about 400 British companies – is designed to offer peer-to-peer support with internationalisation. At the first meeting there was a presentation about the King's Awards, where two recipients and a judge shared a panel discussing the awards. We saw this as the final catalyst.

We decided to commit and then had an 8 week window left to submit our application.

Our application

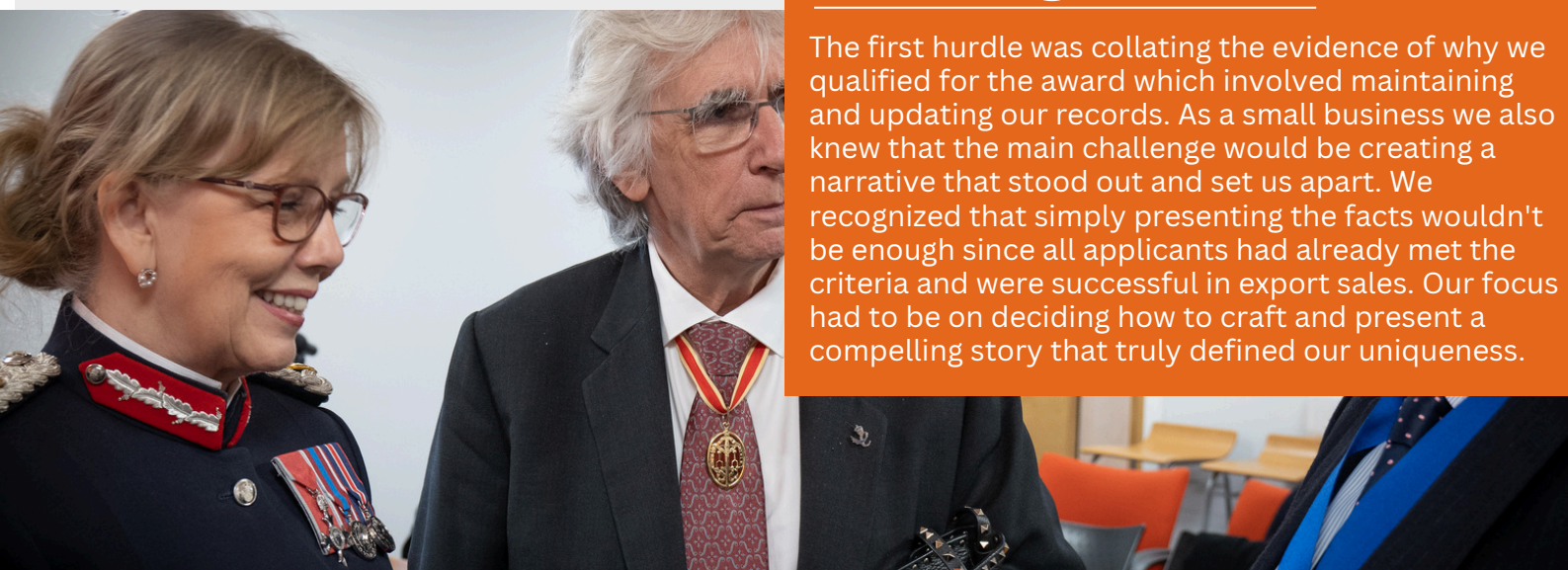
Here are some of the key points we decided on for our application:

- **Our decision-making UK hub:** during our export journey we had explored (with pros and cons) whether to offer in-market services and ultimately now deliver services from our Cheshire hub, as pure export. This decision was based on cost and operational complexity: it is simpler to manage quality. So we decided to make this investment in Cheshire and the UK a positive: we win by selling overseas and invest that money in the local economy.
- **Export strategy:** we clearly receive orders from overseas but also have a strategy about how we approach competitive customers, which countries we export to, and how we try to focus on growth, to enable us to expand our investment locally. We therefore explained our business structures, how we use separate P&Ls to support competitive clients, and how we add new countries to our export list.
- **Industry information:** the judgment of Awards is very factual so we decided to provide a lot of industry information (market information/ benchmarking/ evidence/ competitors etc).
- **Courtesy name-checks:** we are working more closely with DBT (as Export Champions) and the support we receive is invaluable. We decided to name check all the help the UK government gives us, as evidence that our success is a collaboration, thanks to many people in the UK helping. We also outlined the grants we had received and how they had contributed over the years to our success.
- **Politics:** we decided to put some unusual claims in our application: in our export growth we have successfully won more business orders from the EU since Brexit. We wanted to show that this might be unusual and explain that UK companies can navigate the challenges, and therefore included this in our application.
- **Inclusion:** by chance we are a woman-led business and the majority of our employees are female which we decided to make this a key part of our story.
- **Whose award is this?** clearly we were applying for the King's Award 2024. We thought about His Majesty the King and what is important to him, and ensured that we told a sustainable story that might spotlight what a normal services business can do to make itself more green.

We finessed our application, and ensured that the story was not just commercial but about people, places and why the exports mattered.

Challenges to overcome

The first hurdle was collating the evidence of why we qualified for the award which involved maintaining and updating our records. As a small business we also knew that the main challenge would be creating a narrative that stood out and set us apart. We recognized that simply presenting the facts wouldn't be enough since all applicants had already met the criteria and were successful in export sales. Our focus had to be on deciding how to craft and present a compelling story that truly defined our uniqueness.



Lessons and recommendations

In Cheshire, 20% of applicants for the King's Award for Enterprise received the award for 2024, highlighting the tough-criteria you need to meet to receive the award.

If you want to put the time and effort in to make an application, it is absolutely imperative to learn the best way to provide evidence and to enable the judges to see success.

A key lesson for us was to be able to differentiate yourself. Your application should reflect your unique experience - be personal, clear and offer insights beyond the numbers. Effectively explain what the data means and how it showcases your impact.



Listen and learn

For us, it was reaching out to previous recipients and hearing from the judges that finally convinced us to apply. We knew that we had one chance to demonstrate our three-year sales trajectory through Covid-19, so we had to make sure our application was right. At its core, the King's Award for Enterprise is about spotlighting British companies, and by focusing on what you want people to know, you can turn challenges into strengths, just like we did.

Conclusion

Our path to success took three years and a team effort, but receiving the award on a first application can be rare. Our finance lead, CEO, and lead marketer worked together, each contributing unique skills and challenging the details we provided. It was a true collaboration, and we likely wouldn't have succeeded if any one of us had handled the application alone.

The recipients of the King's Award 2024 were revealed on Monday, 6 May, marking the anniversary of His Majesty King Charles' coronation. This is when businesses can officially share the news with employees, suppliers, media, and others. For the team behind the application, it's a validation of their hard work. For employees, being chosen by the King as one of the UK's best is a huge honour. For customers—especially international ones—being able to reference the King adds tremendous prestige. And it's just the beginning: the company can keep the award for five years and can fly the official flag at their premises—our flagpole was ordered immediately!

One company representative was invited to Windsor Castle for a private event hosted by The King—an incredible and rare experience! Following that, the Lord Lieutenant of the county will personally present the award to the company at a venue of your choice. We chose for this ceremony to take place at our office in Holmes Chapel. It was a unique experience allowing all staff to participate in the event.

The time invested in the King's Award for Enterprise is invaluable; it provides insights into your business and connects you with the new cohort of great companies. The King's Award for Enterprise opens doors and it is worth taking the opportunity to walk through them.

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