



## NEWS RELEASE

14 March 2022

# Multiple sclerosis and marine life research to benefit from Livery Company awards

Two Swansea University researchers have won travel scholarships from the Worshipful Livery Company of Wales, which will allow them to further their research and share it with fellow experts.

**Kristen Hawkins works on multiple sclerosis and William Kay researches the impact of marine renewable energy developments on seal populations.**

Both will now be able to take part in important research activities to advance their work, thanks to a total of £1000 of funding awarded by the Livery Company, following a competition open to Swansea University researchers who are in the early stages of their career.

Both winners were invited to a special Awards Dinner recently, held by The Company at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff, where they were presented with their awards by Professor John Solbé.

One of the aims of The Worshipful Livery Company of Wales, founded in 1993, is to “promote education, science, technology and the arts in Wales”. This it achieves by helping young people throughout Wales to develop their talents and skills by means of an annual awards programme of scholarships and bursaries to students in schools, universities and technical colleges, as well as to apprentices and young people in the armed forces.

**Kristen Hawkins, based in the Medical School**, explained how the scholarship would support her research on multiple sclerosis (MS):

*“My project aims to understand the role of oxysterols in MS. Oxysterols are compounds formed from cholesterol, a compound we all have and need in our bodies. However, we believe that its breakdown/manufacture may malfunction in MS.*

*Thanks to the scholarship, I can undertake a week-long visit to the MS Tissue Bank at Imperial College London, which contains the most extensive collection of human MS brain tissue samples in the world.*

*I will be able to prepare brain tissue samples and obtain cerebrospinal fluid from their unique collection, working with Prof. Richard Nicholas. The addition of these new tissue samples will help me to advance my research. I will also present my research to MS specialists in the department.”*

**William Kay from the College of Science** will be sharing his research virtually at a major international expert conference:

*“We are facing a climate emergency. One of the key ways to mitigate climate change is by supporting green electricity generation, such as through marine renewable energy (MRE) developments. However, MRE developments may threaten some of our most important marine life, including seals.*

*I research the behaviour and movement of seals in tidal environments around Wales which are being targeted for MRE developments, in order to reduce the risk of detrimental interaction between the two.*

*I monitor the seals using bio-logging devices developed at Swansea University. Using these, I can assess the potential risk that MRE developments pose and help advise mitigation measures to minimize conflict. My findings will help to protect marine life and support the MRE industry by informing consenting processes.*

*The scholarship means I can attend and present my research at the most prestigious research conference in my field. It’s an opportunity to showcase my research, talk to regulators, and learn from MRE industry experts, but also to highlight the exciting developments in the field here in Wales.”*

**Sylvia Robert-Sargeant, one of the judges for this competition**, in making these Awards to Kristen and William, said:

*“One of The Company’s aims is to encourage and support students to progress with a specific project. We raise funds through various charitable events and also by reaching out, not only to our Liverymen for financial support, but also to the wider community in Wales by inviting Welsh business circles, foundations and other organisations interested in promoting education, science, technology and the arts in Wales, to support our activities.*

*Both of these exciting projects illustrate how such cutting-edge work can make a vital contribution to medical and to environmental research in Wales. We are also delighted to be able to support both Kristen and William in their efforts to build and develop links with fellow experts in their fields.”*

**ENDS**

## **Pictures:**

Kristen Hawkins in the laboratory conducting her research into multiple sclerosis

William Kay aboard a boat during his research into the effect of renewable energy developments on seal populations

Kristen Hawkins and William Kay receiving their awards from Professor John Solbé at the Worshipful Livery Company of Wales Awards Dinner

## **Notes to editors**

**Swansea University** is a world-class, research-led, dual campus university offering a first-class student experience and has one of the best employability rates of graduates in the UK. The University has the highest possible rating for teaching – the Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2018 and was commended for its high proportions of students achieving consistently outstanding outcomes.

Swansea climbed 14 places to 31st in the Guardian University Guide 2019, making us Wales' top ranked university, with one of the best success rates of graduates gaining employment in the UK and the same overall satisfaction level as the Number 1 ranked university.

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 results saw Swansea make the 'biggest leap among research-intensive institutions' in the UK (Times Higher Education, December 2014) and achieved its ambition to be a top 30 research University, soaring up the league table to 26th in the UK.

The University is in the top 300 best universities in the world, ranked in the 251-300 group in The Times Higher Education World University rankings 2018. Swansea University now has 23 main partners, awarding joint degrees and post-graduate qualifications.

The University was established in 1920 and was the first campus university in the UK. It currently offers around 350 undergraduate courses and 350 postgraduate courses to circa 20,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students. The University has ambitious expansion plans as it moves towards its centenary in 2020 and aims to continue to extend its global reach and realise its domestic and international potential.

Swansea University is a registered charity. No.1138342. Visit [www.swansea.ac.uk](http://www.swansea.ac.uk)

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