

GUIDE TO ENTERING THE AWARDS

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The NASS Awards are open to all NASS member schools

Nominations are open from Thursday 1st May 2025

Deadline for entries is midday on Friday 27th June 2025



Being named a finalist for the **Outstanding Impact Award was** fantastic recognition of our employability team's dedication and hard work. It was rewarding to have our efforts externally acknowledged. Writing the bid also allowed us to bring together valuable data on the impact of the Undershaw Diploma on student outcomes, which proved to be excellent evidence for our recent inspection! Additionally, sharing the bid with our stakeholders and Governing Body was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the lasting impact of the Undershaw Diploma on our students' futures.

Emma West. Headteacher Undershaw Education Trust Outstanding Impact 2024 Award Finalist

Contact us

If you have any questions, please contact NASS Business Development & Communications Officer, Susie Patterson spatterson@nasschools.org.uk

Message from NASS CEO

The NASS Awards are a fantastic way to bring our members together and recognise excellence across all our special schools.

It's one of my favourite parts of the year, when we recognise and celebrate the dedication, innovation and impact of individuals and teams in our membership who go above and beyond to support children and young people with SEND.



This is your opportunity to shout about your successes, celebrate your team and highlight the incredible difference they make every day.

We were delighted by the overwhelmingly positive feedback on the changes we introduced last year. Having the awards ceremony as part of our conference programme was a highlight, and thanks to sponsorship support, we were able to truly celebrate our finalists and winners in style.

We are going to keep with our simple and easy awards entry process:

- Simple to use entry form
- This handbook with guidance on writing a strong submission that does justice to your achievements
- A webinar on Tuesday 13th May, where we'll share tips on what makes a great entry, what the judges are looking for and how to avoid common pitfalls!

We've made just one small change to our award categories this year. The Breaking Barriers Award has been reframed to incorporate the theme of inclusion. Many of last year's entries naturally reflected this, and with inclusion being such an important focus in the education sector, we wanted to make it more prominent. This update better highlights the incredible work schools do to break down barriers and create truly inclusive environments.

I want to thank our brilliant judges - Matt, Deirdre and Sharon - for yet again generously volunteering their time to judge this year's awards! New to our judging panel this year is Melissa Farnham, CEO of ASDAN, who will be judging the Special Contribution award. Melissa is no stranger to the NASS community having previously been a member and served as a trustee. We are very grateful for her generous support and that of ASDAN who is our headline sponsor this year. ASDAN's generous support plays a vital role in helping us recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements of our special schools, including providing a free place at the conference for all 12 finalists. Our thanks also to Edwin Group for their sponsorship of the Outstanding Impact award category.

We hope last year's finalists and winners have inspired you to put forward your own achievements this year.

Best of luck with your entries!



Award categories and judging criteria

There are four award categories.

On the following pages, we have outlined the essential criteria that the judges will consider in award submissions.











This award recognises a person, team, establishment or organisation that has carried out exceptional work engaging with external stakeholders to break down barriers and promote inclusion, ensuring positive and sustainable outcomes for children and young people.

This could include stakeholders from your community (geographical or category of SEND), partnership work with mainstream schools, businesses (local, national, or international), local authority partners, or other organisations, with a particular focus on fostering inclusive opportunities and practices.

Judging criteria

To maximise your chances of success, please provide evidence in your entry of:

- Engagement and partnership development demonstrate how you have engaged with external stakeholders or developed existing partnerships to provide new or enhanced opportunities for children and young people, aligned with their aspirations.
- The barriers broken detail the barriers that have been overcome, explaining why the collaboration was important and how it effectively advanced inclusive practices within your setting or community.
- Establishing firm foundations show how the collaboration laid the groundwork for sustainable, inclusive practices that will continue to benefit all involved.
- Collaboration and shared contribution describe the contributions of all those involved with specific examples of how inclusion was embraced and highlight the mutual benefits for all stakeholders.
- Impact and outcomes provide tangible, measurable evidence of the positive impact this work has had in ensuring inclusive, sustainable outcomes for children and young people.

Please note that the judge will score your entry based on these criteria.



Breaking Barriers 2024 Award Winner

Treloar School

Increasing accessibility and inclusivity for students with a physical disability

Read about their winning entry on page 14.

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The Innovation Award recognises the use of new, adapted, or innovative practice within a school or organisation to further improve the lives of children, young people and/or their families, or the organisation as a whole. It can be awarded in any discipline or across disciplines.

This could include innovative use of high or low-tech approaches to your work or new and innovative ways to support young people in their learning. It could include engagement with the world of work or the local community work, or a support package that has impacted upon an individual, cohort or whole group.

Judging criteria

To maximise your chances of success, please provide evidence in your entry of:

- The rationale for innovation explain the reasons behind the innovation. What challenges or needs did it address, and why was this approach chosen?
- Description of the innovation detail the new content, approach, or method introduced, and explain how it is relevant to the individuals or cohort it was designed for.
- Monitoring and adaption explain how the innovation is being monitored and adjusted, if necessary, to ensure its ongoing effective and meaningful practice.
- Impact and outcomes provide tangible, measurable evidence of how this innovation has improved the lives, learning, or outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

Please note that the judge will score your entry based on these criteria.







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The Outstanding Impact Award recognises work that has profoundly impacted the outcomes for children and young people. It celebrates exceptional efforts that have made a significant and measurable difference, whether through a single discipline or multidisciplinary collaboration. The impact may be focused on a specific cohort or extend to a whole-school level.

Judging criteria

To maximise your chances of success, please provide evidence in your entry of:

- Exceptional performance or improvement demonstrate outstanding progress during 2024-2025 or sustained excellence over a longer period of
- The nature of the outstanding work clearly describe the work undertaken and how it has significantly impacted upon the outcomes for children and young people.
- Why the impact is considered outstanding explain why this work goes beyond standard expectations and merits special recognition (note: this is not linked to Ofsted criteria).
- Innovation and outstanding practice highlight creative, forward-thinking, or exemplary methods that contributed to the success.
- Supporting evidence provide reports, data analysis, testimonials (from parents, professionals, or students), or any other relevant material that demonstrates the impact.

Please note that the judge will score your entry based on these criteria.





The Special Contribution Award recognises an individual who has made a meaningful and distinct impact on the lives of those around them - children and young people, colleagues and the wider school community. Their contributions may include mentoring and inspiring others, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, or initiating positive changes within the school or organisation.

You can nominate anyone from your staff team.

Judging criteria

To maximise your chances of success, please provide evidence in your entry of:

- The difference they make describe the positive impact this individual has had on those around them.
- Their support for others explain how their encouragement and contributions have influenced the school or organisation.
- What makes them unique highlight how they go beyond their job description and why they are especially deserving of this award.
- Supporting evidence provide testimonials from colleagues, children, young people, parents, or any other relevant material that demonstrates their impact.

Please note that the judge will score your nomination based on these criteria.



Special Contribution 2024 Award Winner

Jenny McConnell Principal, Dawn House

Read about Jenny on page 17.

Ourjudges

We are extremely grateful to our panel of four independent judges for generously volunteering their time.



Breaking Barriers judge Matt Keer SEND parent and contributor to Special Needs Jungle

Matt is a parent to two profoundly deaf young people who attended a NASS member school. He is a contributor to the parent-led website Special Needs Jungle, and has given evidence to several Parliamentary Select Committee inquiries about the SEND system.



Innovation judge **Deirdre Fitzpatrick** Special school consultant, trainer and inspector

Deirdre works with a range of schools including all through generic special schools, hospital schools, SEMH, PRUs and APs, residential and mainstream schools as well as schools in the maintained and independent sector. She has been an LA advisor, DfE external expert, Director of Education, National Leader in Education, Headteacher and overseer of 3 Outstanding special schools (one of which won TES School of the Year).



Outstanding Impact judge Sharon Gray OBE Education Consultant, Wholehearted Learning

With 22 years experience as a special and mainstream headteacher and a former Ofsted Inspector, Sharon is now an independent consultant providing school improvement support and is also currently working with Kirklees local authority on its SEND transformation plan. She is a trustee of Engage in their Future and is a member of the Youth Justice Board. In 2013 she won Headteacher of the Year at the Pride of Britain Awards and in 2015 was awarded an OBE for services to children with SEND.



Special Contribution judge Melissa Farnham CEO, ASDAN

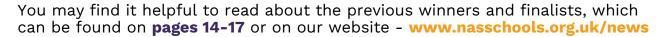
With 25 years of experience in UK education, Melissa has held leadership, governance, and advisory roles across education, charities, and local authorities, including with NASS, The Children's Trust, and BSI. A passionate advocate for inclusion, she has influenced policy, advised on disability rights, and contributed to initiatives promoting equal access. She has worked closely with government bodies, NGOs, and policy groups to improve outcomes for young people with disabilities and additional needs.

How to enter

We have made changes to the entry process to make it easier for you to enter.

Step one - Choose which category to enter

Carefully read all the award categories and judging criteria.



Entry is free for all NASS members and their staff. You may enter one submission per awards category, but please note that schools and organisations who have been funded to undertake work through NASS programmes are not eligible to submit those pieces of work for consideration for awards.



To help maximise your chances of success, please read our tips on page 12.

We will be hosting a webinar on Tuesday 13th May (4pm to 5pm) with some of our judges to help guide you on writing a strong award entry and answer any questions you may have.

Step three - Submit your entry on time

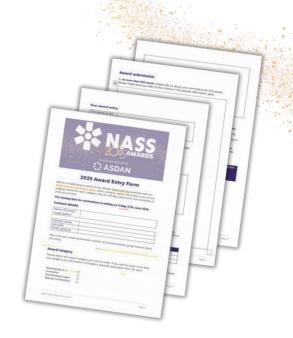
Please submit your entry using our simple award entry form.

Please email your award entry form, along with up to three supporting materials to Susie Patterson, NASS Business Development and Communications Officer, at spatterson@nasschools.org.uk by midday on Friday 27th June 2025.

The main body of the award form will ask you for:

- A summary of your project or the individual you are nominating (maximum 100 words)
- Your award submission (maximum 500 words)

The supporting materials must illustrate or provide evidence of the impact of your nominated project or individual. For example, this could be photos, testimonials, data or video. Please make sure you name each file clearly with the name of your school, award category and project name.



The 2025 awards timeline

Here are the key dates for this year's awards



Shortlisted nominees

If you are successful in being shortlisted, we will ask you to provide us with:

- Three photos that are relevant to your project or the person you have nominated that we can use in promotional materials at the awards event and also afterwards in NASS materials, for example our 2025 impact report.
- A short video (up to 2 mins) about your project or nominated individual that NASS can use at the awards event and in other promotional activity.

Tips for writing your entry

Here are our top tips for writing a good entry and making it stand out.

Give your entry structure

A clear structure makes it easier for the judges to read. Consider using headings that align with the judging criteria to improve coherence and comprehension.

Show impact

Providing evidence is vital for your entry. The judges are interested to learn about the specifics on how the project, activity or individual achieved success.

Be creative and memorable

Consider what sets your award submission apart from the rest - identify what makes your project or the individual you have nominated truly distinctive!

Avoid using jargon

Ensure that your message is easily understood by the judges by using simple and jargon-free language.

Get others involved

Work together with your team or external stakeholders to create a compelling narrative, gather evidence and enhance your submission.

Tell a compelling story

Your entry should not just be about listing achievements, it needs to engage the judges. It's about telling a compelling story backed by solid evidence.

Celebrating the winners and finalists

Thanks to the generous support of ASDAN, our headline sponsor, along with our category sponsors, we are proud to celebrate our winners and finalists and give them the recognition they truly deserve!



All shortlisted schools or individuals will be given one free place at our 2025 NASS conference in Bristol.



The four category winners will be awarded a trophy during the awards ceremony on the afternoon of Thursday 2nd October.



Each winner will receive a special **gift bag** filled by our sponsor with items for you and your schools.



During our conference dinner, finalists and winners will be invited to sit on two special tables for a celebratory toast with champagne.

About our 2025 NASS Awards headline sponsor



ASDAN is an education charity and awarding organisation that provides courses, accredited curriculum programmes, and regulated qualifications to engage, elevate, and empower learners with diverse needs.

To find out more about ASDAN and the work they do to support special schools, please visit: www.asdan.org.uk



ASDAN is proud to support the NASS 2025 Awards, reflecting our strong commitment to equity in education. We believe every learner should be engaged, elevated and empowered, which can only be achieved when the right people are working with and for young people. Our involvement in the awards celebrates those who go above and beyond to create inclusive, meaningful learning experiences, ensuring all learners, regardless of their starting point, have the opportunity to thrive.

Melissa Farnham CEO, ASDAN

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Continued recognition of your achievement

The recognition for our NASS Award winners and finalists doesn't just end at our annual awards ceremony.

There are a number of ways that we will celebrate and recognise the shortlisted and winning schools, organisations and individuals throughout the year.



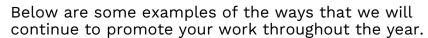
Helping you showcase your success

We will give you the resources to celebrate and gain recognition for your success within your school and wider community.



- Finalist and winner graphics these can be used on your website, social media, in your school newsletter or on the bottom of your emails.
- Finalist and winner certificates sent electronically following the awards ceremony.
- Template press release this can be adapted for you to send to your local media and school community.







- Inclusion in our annual NASS impact report along with other NASS marketing resources, e.g. new member brochure, NASS member handbook and 2025 NASS Awards information pack.
- Case studies for lobbying work where relevant, we will use your work to provide evidence when collaborating with or influencing key stakeholders.
- Website and social media we will highlight and promote your projects and activity on our digital platforms. This includes announcing winners and finalists, writing case studies for our website and utilising awareness days to spotlight your work.
- Webinars Winners will be asked to contribute to future NASS webinars or as part of short films to explain their ideas to other schools and disseminate award winning practice.
- Podcast Through our NASS Partner, B Squared, winners will be invited to record an episode for SENDcast to showcase their work.

2024 winners and finalists



2024 winner

Treloar School

Increasing accessibility and inclusivity for students with a physical disability

2024 Shortlisted nominees

- Great Howarth School Poetry by Heart Project
- Mary Hare School Little Hares

Treloar School - Increasing accessibility and inclusivity for students with a physical disability

In March 2024, Treloar students participated in Dance Live, a national competition at G Live in Guildford. While many schools would find this journey straightforward, Treloar's path was far from easy. The community and its partners had to overcome substantial barriers, but through innovation, grit, and perseverance, they achieved not only an inspiring performance but also lasting improvements in accessibility. Their efforts promote the arts and encourage future opportunities for wheelchair users to perform.

Treloar's all-wheelchair dance team faced significant logistical challenges. The venue required adaptations for 20 wheelchair users, accessible bathrooms, and a safe fire evacuation plan. Determined to succeed, the team worked with G Live staff to find solutions. A key breakthrough was repurposing the orchestra pit, enabling simultaneous evacuation and dramatically improving safety. G Live's commitment to accessibility extended beyond this event, paving the way for future inclusivity.

Each student had a role showcasing their talents, from choreography to costume design. One disengaged student found purpose designing the team's logo, leading to their first school visit in over a year. The awards judge praised the initiative, noting that every pupil was given a meaningful, challenging role.

The collaboration set new standards for accessibility in performance spaces. G Live pledged to upgrade its facilities, and Dance Live organisers adopted lessons to better support special schools and disabled youth groups. As G Live noted, these solutions created a sustainable model, breaking down both physical and societal barriers.

Watch a short video about the project and read about other the shortlisted nominees in this category: More information

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2024 winner

Aurora Hanley School Children's Community Cooking Project

2024 Shortlisted nominees

- The Children's Trust Sensory Careers Project
- Arc Oakbridge Music Technology and Podcast Project

Aurora Hanley School - Children's Community Cooking Project

Based in an area of high deprivation, Aurora Hanley has been working towards making students more aware of sustainability and community issues. It developed an innovative project to collect waste food from local shops and supermarkets, transforming it into nutritious meals for those in the local community facing food poverty.

Through a partnership with a local church, students gather surplus food that is safe to eat but past its sell-by date and use it in cooking lessons. In the first two weeks, they provided 31 meals, a number that has now exceeded 300. The initiative has had a profound impact, with students highly motivated to help people in their local community in need.

Beyond community support, the project builds essential life skills. Students develop independence in cooking while learning about hygiene, nutrition, budgeting and food safety. Reading and maths skills are applied through recipes, feedback and portion calculations. Meals are labelled with safety information and tailored to dietary needs.

Students have been involved at every stage, including designing the project's logo. The initiative has also boosted enthusiasm for food technology lessons by giving them real-world purpose.

The initiative has also helped build resilience by encouraging students to work in different facilities and unfamiliar settings, linking to careers education. The project aligns with the school's broader curriculum, supporting students with ASD, SEN, and high anxiety in developing the confidence and skills needed for independence.

The response has been overwhelmingly positive. One student shared, "I enjoy cooking for other children who may not eat a healthy hot meal." Families have expressed deep gratitude, with one remarking, "We can't believe we had such beautiful food delivered to our door."

By combining community service with skill-building, the project exemplifies Aurora Hanley's mission to empower students and prepare them for meaningful futures.

Watch a short video about the project and read about other the shortlisted nominees in this category: More information





2024 winner

Gretton School The embedding of Relational Practice

2024 Shortlisted nominees

- The Children's Trust Sensory Careers Project
- Arc Oakbridge Music Technology and Podcast Project

Gretton School - The embedding of Relational Practice

In recognition of its transformative work in supporting autistic learners, Gretton School was named the winner of the Outstanding Impact category for its commitment to Relational Practice—a whole-school approach centred on connection, consistency, and positive relationships. This method has significantly improved emotional regulation among learners, reduced anxiety, and reshaped how staff engage with behaviour through understanding rather than discipline.

Gretton supports autistic learners aged 5 to 19 and over the past four years, under the leadership of Headteacher Beth Elkins, the school has embedded Relational Practice into every aspect of its culture. Staff are encouraged to "hold the learner in positive regard, no matter what," an ethos that has reframed how behaviour is approached and addressed.

At Gretton, traditional behaviour policies have been replaced by systems of reflection, restoration, and aspiration. Solution-focused discussions help staff and learners work collaboratively to identify goals and develop strategies for emotional regulation. This approach not only supports day-today interactions—such as navigating social situations or managing changes to routine—but also builds long-term skills for communication, self-belief, and resilience.

Staff report that the shift in language and perspective has had a profound effect. Many learners arrive at Gretton having experienced trauma or disrupted education, where even hearing their own name can be a trigger. Through modelling, guided social learning, and patient, consistent support, learners gain confidence in managing relationships and self-expression. Four years into implementing Relational Practice, the school has seen a marked reduction in behavioural incidents, even as the student body has grown. The impact extends beyond the classroom—families and staff also report significant improvements in wellbeing and connection.

Watch a short video about the project and read about other the shortlisted nominees in this category: More information







2024 winner

Jenny McConnell **Principal, Dawn House**

2024 Shortlisted nominees

- Richard Nancollis, Interim Head, Ashcroft School & Deputy Head for Post 16, Inscape House School
- Dr Mimi Kirke-Smith, Head of HEART and Therapy, West Heath School

Jenny McConnell - Principal, Dawn House

In nominating Jenny, the team at Dawn House School described her as "a beacon of light in our school community".

For 30 years, Jenny has been a transformative force at Dawn House School. Her dedication and creativity have revolutionised speech and language therapy, fostering independence in students. In her roles as Deputy Head, Head of the Speech & Language Therapy team, and now Principal, Jenny has offered unwavering support to both students and staff. She has unified the school, championed mental wellbeing and integrated therapeutic practices across all grade levels.

"Her commitment to the wellbeing of our school community, her unwavering support, and her visionary leadership have left an indelible mark on generations of students and staff. We are incredibly fortunate to have her as part of our school family, and her contributions deserve the highest recognition.'

Watch a short video about Jenny and read about other the shortlisted nominees in this category: More information



Not sure which category to choose or how to start writing your entry?

Join us for our webinar on Tuesday 13th May, 4pm to 5pm

NASS and the judges will be sharing tips on how to write a clear, compelling entry, guidance on how to use supporting evidence to strengthen your submission and answer any questions you have.











Find out more



info@edwin.group

 Specialist SEND recruitment, retention & workload reduction solutions - supporting you, your school, your trust & your people.









- Temporary & permanent recruitment
- Staff wellbeing training for your valued teams
- Strategic HR & leadership support
- Inclusive character education & active learning programmes
- Tailored tuition packages













Unlocking potential: the ASDAN journey

ASDAN is proud to be the headline sponsor for the 2025 NASS Awards. Our mission is to **engage** learners with diverse needs to achieve meaningful learning outcomes which **elevate** them to go on to further education, training and work, and **empower** them with agency to make decisions in their lives.

Tailored progression pathways

For many young learners, the ASDAN journey begins in Key Stage 2 with Lifeskills Challenge – our online bank of practical, adaptable activities designed to nurture self-awareness and introduce core skills. With challenges aligned to Working Towards Entry Level 1 through to Level 2, Lifeskills Challenge provides an inclusive foundation for learners to participate and thrive.

As learners move into Key Stage 3, they may continue with Lifeskills Challenge to deepen their understanding and advance their skills. Alternatively, they can explore ASDAN's **Key Steps** programme or **Short Courses** on 30 subjects, which recognise and award personal steps of achievement through interest-led learning. These courses not only enhance engagement but also help learners develop a portfolio —an essential aspect of further study and vocational progression.

At Key Stage 4, ASDAN supports learners to take greater ownership of their learning. The **Personal Development Programmes (PDP)** offer an excellent next step, building confidence and personal qualities through diverse activities that complement the wider curriculum.

For those seeking an accredited qualification, the renewed **Personal Effectiveness Qualification (PEQ)** available for first teaching in September 2025, will provide a structured way to develop key skills valued by employers and further education providers.

The updated PEQ will include an Entry Level 3 qualification – a crucial addition that will enable learners working just below GCSE level to achieve a meaningful qualification outcome. This improvement ensures an inclusive and structured progression pathway:

- Entry Level 3 supports learners developing their skills just below GCSE level.
- Level 1 and Level 2 learners work at GCSE level.
- Level 3 learners develop skills equivalent to A-level study.

A teacher using ASDAN's programmes shared: "I'd definitely recommend ASDAN. We love the flexibility it offers to enable all students to gain certification for their work, no matter the level of support needed. ASDAN puts learners at the centre, and that's what we believe in. Everyone has embraced it, and we couldn't be happier with the results."

At ASDAN, we meet learners where they are. Our approach promotes both agency and autonomy. Through its diverse range of courses, ASDAN offers all learners the opportunity to discover, develop and make use of their abilities to affirm their identities and contribute meaningfully to society.

Our team can guide you towards the right course for you and your learners. Please fill out this expression of interest form and an ASDAN expert will be in touch.



Scan the QR code or visit us at: asdan.org.uk



Terms and conditions

Entry conditions and judging process

- Entry is free to all NASS member organisations and their staff.
- The 2025 NASS Awards celebrate achievements during the 2024/2025 academic year.
- We will accept submissions based on projects, initiatives or endeavours that commenced before this time provided that core achievements have taken place during this main period of focus. A single school, home or centre may enter one submission per category and can enter as many categories as they wish, but you must complete a separate submission for each to meet the criteria.
- Schools and organisations who have been funded to undertake work through NASS programmes are not eligible to submit those pieces of work for consideration for awards.
- Group and academy trust schools, homes and centres can enter as above and are not limited to one per category per group or trust i.e. each individual site can enter if they so wish and have a worthy nomination.
- If your entry relates to an initiative or project carried out in collaboration with other schools, homes or centres the submission should come from the lead school, home or centre, and any shortlisting will be in the name of that school, home or centre.
- All entries must be received by midday on Friday 27th June 2025. Entries received after the closing date will not be accepted.
- All entries will be treated equally and fairly.
- Each award category will be judged by an independent judge and their decision is final.

GDPR & Data Protection

- In compliance with GDPR regulations, please ensure that you have the permission of the school, organisation or individual before submitting an entry and that permission is in place for this to be shared for the purpose of the NASS Awards.
- The details submitted on the award entry form and in any accompanying documents will be used, stored and shared in the following ways:
 - a. The data provided will be used, stored and shared by NASS for the administration of the 2025 NASS Awards, including but not limited to the award ceremony and correspondence (to confirm receipt of the entry, notification of the outcome of the entry, certificate and prize personalisation.
 - b. The award entry form (and details taken from them) and accompanying documents will be shared with the judging panel.
- NASS will seek further permission for the use of images and case studies on its website, social media and for marketing purposes.