

# Legal Aid Practitioners Group makes four special awards, to honour the 'social justice heroes of the pandemic'.

**'We are proud to recognise colleagues whose decisive actions at the start of the outbreak and since have helped save many lives,' says LAPG CEO Chris Minnoch.**

The board of the Legal Aid Practitioners Group is making four LAPG Special Awards in response to this year's Covid-19 outbreak. The awards are to celebrate some of the social justice heroes of the pandemic, who have worked selflessly over recent months to protect clients, staff and fellow lawyers - and ensure the wheels of justice have kept turning as safely as possible.

Three individuals and one organisation are being recognised by LAPG during this uniquely challenging year (further details about each winner, below):

- Richard Atkinson, partner at Tuckers Solicitors, and co-chair of the Law Society's criminal law committee;
- Jenny Beck, director of Beck Fitzgerald, co-chair of LAPG, and member of The Law Society's access to justice committee;
- Matthew Howgate, specialist legal aid management consultant;
- Detention Action, the campaigning organisation which supports people in immigration detention.

**Chris Minnoch, LAPG CEO, says:**

*'There are many, many individuals and organisations who deserve a medal for the way they have responded to the potentially dangerous circumstances we find ourselves in. We can't honour them all. We wish we could - but the LAPG board wanted to make these four awards to express our heartfelt admiration and support for those who in their different ways and different areas of practice have been battling every day of this pandemic to keep people safe and ensure access to justice in this country.'*

LAPG Special Awards are reserved for individuals and organisations making a wholly exceptional contribution to the profession and to access to justice, often in addition to their day-to-day legal practice. This is only the fourth time LAPG has made Special Awards (see details of previous awards, below).

## Chris Minnoch explains why the four winners are being honoured by LAPG's board:

*'Richard Atkinson is a criminal defence practitioner who is responsible for the development and introduction of a nationwide protocol for lawyers attending clients at the police station, after negotiating with the Ministry of Justice, Legal Aid Agency, Home Office, and National Police Chiefs Council. His almost single-handed efforts undoubtedly saved lives.'*

*'Jenny Beck is a family solicitor who has devoted huge energies to campaigning for greater protection of victims of domestic abuse during lockdown. Jenny is our co-chair and I have seen first-hand the impact of her work with the Legal Aid Agency, Ministry of Justice, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and in many other respects.'*

*'Matt Howgate is a consultant who has been an amazing resource for the social justice sector during this crisis. He has been at our side since the very beginning, poring over spreadsheets to urgently assess the impact on law centres, which was instrumental in securing emergency grant funding from the Ministry of Justice.'*

*'Detention Action is a small but incredibly effective charity. Its brave and principled campaign and legal action - with expert support from its legal team from Duncan Lewis and Matrix Chambers - forced the government to release many immigration detainees during the outbreak. This would not have happened without them.'*

The four LAPG Special Awards are in addition to - and entirely separate from - the annual LALY awards, which have celebrated the work of social justice lawyers every year since 2003. The winners of LALY20 are decided by an independent judging panel and will be announced at a virtual ceremony on 7 July (see below for more details).

## Chris Minnoch says:

*'Legal aid lawyers are nothing if not resilient, but every individual and every organisation has a breaking point. With the added burden of the pandemic on an already under-resourced, exhausted and beleaguered profession, too many of our social justice colleagues are getting perilously close to reaching theirs - and there will be no social justice in this country without them. That is why we wanted to salute our 2020 Special Award winners, for their herculean efforts on behalf of clients and colleagues, and to ensure the rule of law, throughout this long period of lockdown. Much of this vital work has been done on their own time, unpaid - and in the face of official intransigence or indifference at best - or downright hostility at worst.'*

Previous winners of LAPG Special awards are Baroness Doreen Lawrence (2012); criminal defence solicitors and campaigners Bill Waddington, Robin Murray, Jon Black, and Paul Harris (2015); District Judge, Court of Protection, Anselm Eldergill, and former Young Legal Aid Lawyers co-chairs Rachel Frances and Oliver Carter (2019).

## Notes for Editors:

1. The Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year awards are into their 18th year. They are organised on a not-for-profit basis by LAPG, and are the only awards aimed solely at lawyers doing publicly-funded work
2. LAPG is the leading membership organisation for legal aid lawyers, providing a wide range of services and support [www.lapg.co.uk](http://www.lapg.co.uk)
3. For the first time ever the LALY award presentation ceremony will be held online. The event will be free to air and broadcast live in the evening of **Tuesday, 7 June 2020**. Follow @LALYawards #LALY20 or visit [www.lapg.co.uk/lalys](http://www.lapg.co.uk/lalys) for the latest news on how to register and view the event
4. For more information, contact:

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