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**Moderator questions in Bold**, Respondents in Regular text.

**KEY: Unable to decipher** = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

M: Thank you very much, Ann, for, for that welcome. Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenants, Deputy Lieutenants, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm delighted to be able to join you and to welcome you along today to hear about the benefits and the value of holding a Queen's Award for Enterprise. Back in February when I met Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for County Antrim, David McCorkell, and the Deputy Lieutenant for County Londonderry, Doctor Bill McGinnis, I said that I was more than happy to support them in their efforts to promote the Queen's Award for Enterprise in Northern Ireland in whatever way I could. So, I would especially like to welcome colleagues from the Queen's Awards for Enterprise Office at the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy who have travelled over from England to tell us about the awards in particular and how Northern Ireland businesses can go about submitting an application. I'm also delighted to welcome a previous award winner, Kelvatek Ltd, and to acknowledge this year's winners, Edge Innovate, FinTrU, Send My Bag and G&L Scientific. Indeed, for Edge Innovate and Send My Bag, this is their second Queen's Award so congratulations to you all. We're going to hear from some of these winners later about their experiences of holding an award and what it has meant for their business globally. Of course, we can't escape the difficult times that we are living in. We're in a post-pandemic world, we face many global supply challenges, inflationary pressures that are adding to the cost of living crisis and, of course, the shocking and awful impacts of the conflict in Ukraine.

But what we do know is that an economy that nurtures and grows businesses that are innovative and that sell their goods and services in international markets is an economy that will thrive and generate wealth for every person and every community across Northern Ireland. Now, Northern Ireland may be small, it may be a, a regional economy, but our desire to succeed and our aspirations are no less ambitious than those of other leading economies around the world, as is demonstrated here today with so many successful exporters represented in this room. In the foreword to my strategy document, '10x Economy and Economic Vision for a Decade of Innovation', it says, 'I am immensely proud of the resilience, innovation and creativity shown by our local businesses.' That resilience, innovation and creativity has never been more evident than during the very difficult times endured throughout the past two years of the pandemic, and will continue to be needed in abundance in the years that lie ahead. This year, 232 businesses across the United Kingdom received a Queen's Award for Enterprise in one of four categories, International Trade, Innovation, Sustainable Development, and Promoting Opportunity through Social Mobility. As I've just mentioned, four of those businesses are from Northern Ireland. That's just under 2% of award participants. I think that everybody in this room will agree with me when I say that we can do much better than this. So, whether you are a business active in international trade, you have a great innovative product or service, or you're running a sustainable development programme, these awards offer a unique way to recognise the achievements of your company and your teams.

Today, I want to encourage you to apply for the Award, to learn from our speakers here this morning about the application process, the benefits of receiving the UK's most prestigious business honour, and understand how companies have leveraged their power to grow and succeed internationally. I know you will find this morning's session both informative and inspiring, and I hope that in 2023 we will see more companies from Northern Ireland submitting applications and being successful in achieving the Queen's Award for Enterprise. So, I'd now like to hand over to Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for County Antrim, David McCorkell, to say a few words. Thank you very much.