

Record number of entries for 2014 Petplan awards

FINALISTS for the 2014 Petplan Veterinary Awards have said they are "delighted" and "shocked" to have been selected.

The awards – held in association with *Veterinary Times* – aim to provide an opportunity for both pet owners and members of the profession to reward veterinary staff for their hard work and dedication.

Now in their 15th year, the awards – categories of which include Vet of the Year, Vet Nurse of the Year, Vet Practice of the Year, Practice Support Staff of the Year and Practice Manager of the Year – received more than 12,000 nominations; the highest amount yet. The entries were whittled down by an expert panel including BVA president Robin Hargreaves, BVNA president Kirstie Shield, RCVS president Neil Smith, *Veterinary Times*' editor Paul Imrie and some of last year's winners, leaving just three in each category.

Vet of the Year

Making the final cut in the Vet of the Year category were Hector Low of the Old Mill Veterinary Practice on the Isle of Lewis, Jade Lowe of Pilgrims Veterinary Practice in Hampshire and Sue Lo of the Livingston branch of Companion Care.

Mr Low, whose practice is the only one on his island, said he was "completely gobsmacked"

report by

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when contacted by Petplan and struggled to comprehend the news he was a finalist.

"I thought somebody was winding me up, I really did," he said. "I might have sounded a bit rude [when told by Petplan] but I really did think it was someone taking the Michael.

"I don't know what to think – I just think somebody's made a mistake here."

Mr Low added he "couldn't believe" he had been picked from 12,000 nominations. "It's nice to think nominations have come from clients," he said.

Miss Lo, whose interests include medicine and surgery as well as small furies, said she was "slightly chuffed" and "quite flattered and honoured" by the news, as well as feeling "appreciated" by her clients. "It's a bit of a shock. I just do this as a job and I don't expect anything like this," she said.

Vet Nurse of the Year

Over in the Vet Nurse of the Year category, the top three were unveiled as Kristy Buss from Total Pet Care in Surrey, Tina Wright from Warbeck House Veterinary Centre in Merseyside and Victoria Hall

from Nute Veterinary Surgery in Cornwall.

Miss Hall, who started as a student VN at 16, said it was "really exciting" to be nominated. "I love the job and get so excited by the different cases we see. I have the same enthusiasm now as I did on the day I started."

Miss Buss, who is in her 20th year with her practice, said the news was a "total shock".

"I never in a million years thought I would be nominated. A nomination apparently went in from a client and was then backed up by nominations from other clients, which is lovely.

"I love my job, but I just get on and do it on a daily basis. I didn't expect this at all."

Practice of the Year

Over in the Practice of the Year category, finalist positions have gone to Cathcart and Winn Veterinary Clinic and Hospital in Surrey, SPA Veterinary Services in Gloucestershire and The Vets' Place in Cheshire.

Nick Winn, principal of Cathcart and Winn, said he and the staff were surprised and very pleased by the news.

"[We're] very delighted about it," he said. "It's still a mystery to us [about who nominated the practice], but obviously we're very grateful to them and we're very proud of the whole team. This award in particular recognises the contribution



the whole team makes, which is very appropriate in our practice," he said.

At The Vets' Place, Michael Hough, who co-owns the practice with his wife Wendy, said the team was already "thrilled" when they heard of their nomination (as well as nods in the vet and nurse categories), so became "quite overwhelmed" when they heard they made the final three for the practice award.

"We are so proud of the whole team, who have helped to grow the practice, and are extremely grateful to our supportive clients who have so kindly shown their appreciation," he said. "We have found the success has created a real buzz in the practice, both within our team as well as among the clients, who have been

wishing us every success."

Finalists in the Practice Support Staff of the Year category are Anthony West from Aylsham Vets in Norfolk, Henrietta Fidler from Beech House Veterinary Centre in Surrey and Joyce Durbin from Highcroft Veterinary Group in Bristol. Rounding out the categories, Chris Gudge from Highcroft Veterinary Group in Bristol, Niki Burton from Eastcott Veterinary Hospital in Wiltshire and Sharon Lane-Kieltyka from Shepton Veterinary Group in Somerset were named as the finalists for the Practice Manager of the Year award.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony on April 2 at Birmingham Town Hall. Broadcaster and ex-MP Gyles Brandreth returns as host to oversee proceedings.