

2026 Clare Business Excellence Awards

Introduction

Welcome to **Clare Business Excellence Awards 2026**.

Whether you are one of our regular entrants who use these annual awards to benchmark ongoing performance, or you are new to Clare Business Excellence Awards, you are welcome.

As a past entrant, I can vouch for how worthwhile these awards are, not least because the Awards Gala is a great night out!

Ennis Chamber recruit specialist adjudicators (SpotCheck Northern Ireland) to judge categories that involve mystery shoppers, café and restaurant reviewers, as well as specialists who understand what constitutes excellent service and hospitality. Added to that there's a superb panel of independent adjudicators appointed to evaluate the written submission categories.

This year marks the 16th anniversary of Clare Business Excellence Awards. We decided to shake things up in recent years by introducing several new categories including 'Best Family Business', 'Best New Business', 'Business for Social Impact' and a special award to celebrate 'Innovation in Business' – all have been well received and are here to stay. Added to the established categories, I can guarantee there's an award to suit all business types and every sector.

While we appreciate that everyone is busy, and time is precious, we hope you will make time to enter this year's Clare Business Excellence Awards. Submissions are online, on the homepage of our website: www.ennischamber.ie The application forms are short, straightforward and accessible to all. And most important, it's FREE to enter.

Finally, we sincerely thank Clare County Council our overall sponsor and each of our category sponsors listed in this brochure, Clare Business Excellence Awards couldn't happen without their support.

FRANK HOLLY President, Ennis Chamber | 2026

The Clare Business Excellence Awards provide Clare County Council with a further opportunity to support and showcase the hard-working business community across the county. The inclusive range of award categories ensures that businesses of all sizes and from all sectors can be part of this important celebration.

At Clare County Council, we are proud to support these annual business awards, hosted by Ennis Chamber. It is also encouraging to see how many winners and finalists have availed of training opportunities, grants and other supports provided by Clare County Council, particularly through the wide range of initiatives offered by Local Enterprise Office Clare.

Through our sponsorship of these awards, Clare County Council acknowledges and celebrates the significant contribution that locally based businesses make to Clare's economy through employment, innovation and investment.

We also recognise the important support that local businesses provide to communities throughout the county.

On behalf of Clare County Council, I wish all businesses entering this year's Clare Business Excellence Awards the very best of luck.

CLLR. PAUL MURPHY Cathaoirleach, Clare County Council | 2026



Frank Holly

President | Ennis Chamber

2026



Cllr. Paul Murphy

Cathaoirleach | Clare County Council

2026

ENTRIES & JUDGING

Why Enter the Clare Business Excellence Awards 2026

It makes good business sense on many levels, it provides:

- A benchmarking opportunity
- Independent judges feedback
- A means to differentiate you from competitors
- Brand awareness building
- Recognition of your businesses achievements and successes
- Access to new customers (opens doors)
- Boost to staff morale and helps attract and retain talent

Can you enter more than one category? Yes, But maximum of 3

Entries Deadline (mystery shopping categories) August 04

Entries Deadline (written submission categories) September 04



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Spotcheck

ABOUT THE JUDGING PANEL

Spotcheck has successfully measured businesses performance and customer perceptions for over ten years and provides a wide range of business consultancy, customer measurement and training services. Spotcheck currently provides independent judging for business awards throughout Ireland – from local business awards to nationwide industry sector awards, making sure all entrants are judged fairly, consistently and independently.

For more info visit www.spotcheckni.co.uk or T: 00 44 28 90 454 062. E: jbeasant@spotcheckni.co.uk

ENNIS CHAMBER PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Ennis Chamber President's Award recognises an individual whose contributions have positively influenced the local economy, fostered innovation, and inspired others in the business community.

This award will be presented to someone whose achievements go beyond personal success, leaving a lasting impact on County Clare's economic landscape.

The recipient will exemplify these values through a career built on vision, courage and commitment.

The decision on who will receive this award rests with Frank Holly, President of Ennis Chamber, in consultation with a nominated group from within Ennis Chamber Board.

CLARE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026 - Categories & Sponsors

BUSINESS FOR SOCIAL IMPACT AWARD
Sponsored by EssilorLuxottica

EssilorLuxottica

BEST VOLUNTARY / COMMUNITY GROUP
Sponsored by Vitalograph

Vitalograph

BEST MICRO BUSINESS IN CLARE
Sponsored by Clare Local Enterprise Office

CL
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Local Enterprise Office
An Clár - Clare

BEST NEW BUSINESS (UP TO 5 YEARS)
Sponsored by Tierney's

TIERNEY'S
When It Matters

BEST FAMILY BUSINESS
Sponsored by MHP Sellors

MHP | Sellors
SOLICITORS

INNOVATION IN BUSINESS AWARD
Sponsored by PTSB

ptsb

BEST USE OF DIGITAL MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA
Sponsored by Clare Echo

Clare Echo

BEST SME IN CLARE
Sponsored by Cup Print

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PROFESSIONAL SERVICES EXCELLENCE AWARD
Sponsored by Bank of Ireland

Bank of Ireland

BEST MANUFACTURER
Sponsored by EI

EI

BEST GREEN & SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES
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BEST TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN CLARE
Sponsored by TUS

TUS

BEST HOSPITALITY PROVIDER IN CLARE
Sponsored by The Shannon Airport Group

Shannon
THE AIRPORT GROUP

BEST PLACE TO EAT (2 Sub-categories)
Sponsored by AIB

BEST PLACE TO EAT - RESTAURANT
BEST PLACE TO EAT - BISTRO/CAFÉ

AIB

CLARE RETAILER OF THE YEAR
Sponsored by Clean Ireland Recycling

Clean Ireland Recycling

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD
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Accountancy Audit Advisory

OVERALL WINNER CLARE BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026
Sponsored by the awards lead sponsor - Clare County Council

Clare County Council

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BUSINESS FOR SOCIAL IMPACT AWARD

Sponsored by EssilorLuxottica

Business for Social Impact Award' recognises a business making a meaningful contribution to their local or broader communities beyond their core

This award celebrates businesses that show leadership, generosity, and sustained community involvement.

What are the adjudicators looking for:

- ❑ Active participation in local events, initiatives, or partnerships
- ❑ Creation of a bespoke event
- ❑ Volunteering programmes or staff engagement in community service
- ❑ Operating with integrity, fairness, and transparency
- ❑ Working with schools, nonprofits, or other businesses for broader community impact
- ❑ Playing a leadership role in local initiatives or crisis response (e.g., during natural disasters or economic downturns)
- ❑ Supporting underrepresented /vulnerable or marginalised groups within the community

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BEST VOLUNTARY / COMMUNITY GROUP

Sponsored by Vitalograph

The Best Voluntary/Community Group award carries a cash prize of €500 to the winner.

The purpose of this award is to acknowledge groups, powered by volunteers, who have played a significant role in enhancing the quality of life in their local community.

Judging is via written submission – a short case study will suffice. The judges simply want to hear what your group did over the past year that made your contribution to your local community special.

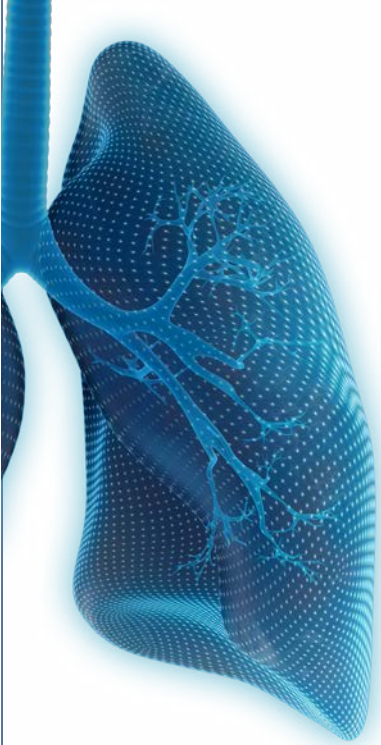
We want to hear from you:

- If you represent a sports club or local voluntary group who has supported people living in their community
- You are part of a long-standing community group such as Tidy Towns or a local tourism community group etc
- You organise local festivals and events to help boost your local economy
- Your group launched a new community/voluntary initiative in the past year

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BEST MICRO BUSINESS IN CLARE

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This award is open to all small independently owned businesses who employ 10 staff (FTE) or less, whose growth and quality of management has enabled it to out-perform the competition.

This award is judged by written submission and judges will be looking for evidence of the following:

- Evidence of key growth areas for the business and how these have been identified
- Evidence of robust management systems appropriate to the operation of the business
- Evidence of innovation in terms of the product or service provided
- Evidence of a carefully planned growth strategy to sustain current success

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BEST NEW BUSINESS (UP TO 5 YEARS)

Sponsored by Tierney's

Awarded to an innovative, new business (under 5 years old) that shows significant promise and potential for impact through unique business models or products.

Criteria for "Best New Business" as follow:

- ❑ **Innovation & Originality:** Unique product or service offering/ Creative approach to solving market problems/ Differentiation from competitors
- ❑ **Business Growth & Performance:** Revenue growth since launch/ Market traction (e.g., customer acquisition, sales volume)/ Profitability or a clear path to sustainability
- ❑ **Business Plan & Strategy:** Clear vision, mission, and goals/Effective business model/ Sound financial planning and forecasting
- ❑ **Market Impact & Reach:** Market share or penetration/ Customer feedback and satisfaction/ Partnerships or collaborations
- ❑ **Leadership & Team:** Strength and experience of founders and leadership/ Ability to attract, retain, and develop talent/ Company culture and employee engagement
- ❑ **Scalability & Growth Potential:** Plans for future expansion (geographic, product lines, etc.)/ Investment readiness or ability to scale operations/ Competitive advantage for long-term growth
- ❑ **Sustainability & Social Impact (Optional but Valued):** Ethical practices and corporate social responsibility/ Environmental sustainability/ Community engagement
- ❑ **Use of Technology (if applicable):** Effective use of technology or digital tools/ Innovation in product delivery or customer experience

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When IT Matters

BEST FAMILY BUSINESS

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We have long celebrated and will continue to support family businesses in Ireland. Family run businesses are at the heart of our communities across the towns and villages of County Clare. We value the familiarity and trust that comes from dealing with a family-run enterprise.

This award recognises outstanding family-owned and operated businesses that demonstrate excellence in performance, values, governance, and succession planning.

Criteria for Best Family Business Award

- ❑ **Business Performance & Sustainability:** Consistent financial growth and profitability/ Long-term business sustainability/ Evidence of strategic planning and resilience through economic cycles
- ❑ **Family Involvement:** Active participation of family members in leadership, management, or operations/ Balance between family ownership and professional management (if applicable)
- ❑ **Succession Planning & Generational Transition:** Presence of a documented succession plan or recent transition/ Mentorship and leadership development within the family
- ❑ **Values & Company Culture:** Strong core values rooted in family principles/Ethical business practices and integrity/Positive workplace culture and employee engagement
- ❑ **Innovation & Adaptability:** Ability to innovate while maintaining family traditions/Adoption of new technologies, processes, or business models/Flexibility to adapt to changing markets and consumer needs
- ❑ **Governance & Decision-Making:** Governance structures in place
- ❑ **Community Involvement & Social Responsibility:** Contribution to local community initiatives or charities/Support for family and social causes/ Environmental responsibility and sustainability efforts

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INNOVATION IN BUSINESS AWARD

Sponsored by PTSB

This award will champion those who think differently — innovators who turn ideas into solutions. It is open to micro, small, medium and large companies.

Entrants are invited to demonstrate how creativity and fresh thinking have powered business growth and have made a measurable impact on their company's success.

*Entries will be assessed in the context of the size and resources of the business.

Criteria:

- **Originality of the Innovation:** Introduction of a novel idea, product, service, or process/ Creativity in addressing existing industry or customer challenges/ First-to-market or significantly improved approach over current standards
- **Business Impact:** Tangible business results from the innovation
- **Problem Solving:** Clear articulation of the problem or gap the innovation addresses/ Evidence that the solution effectively meets that need
- **Implementation Strategy:** How the innovation was developed and integrated into the business
- **Scalability & Sustainability:** Potential for the innovation to grow or be adopted at scale/ Long-term viability of the solution (financially, environmentally, etc.)/ Ability to adapt or evolve the innovation over time
- **Technology Use (if applicable):** Smart or novel use of technology to drive innovation/ Integration of AI, automation, data, or digital platforms

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BEST USE OF DIGITAL MARKETING / SOCIAL MEDIA

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Digital marketing and social media are key components of smart marketing. Having a targeted digital plan and an engaged social media presence across relevant platforms is imperative for customer-facing businesses.

A good digital strategy and execution across platforms including website, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok allows business to raise awareness and communicate effectively with customers and stakeholders.

If your business makes clever use of digital marketing/social media as business building tools this is the category for you. Judging is on written submission and an audit of your digital assets.

Judicators will seek some basic information including:

- An outline of how your business has integrated/adopted digital/social/marketing into its overall marketing plan?
- A map of your digital marketing journey and progress to date
- Did you invest in training? Did you apply for grants to help develop your website or stronger digital presence?
- Have you run an attention-grabbing campaign? If so, tell us about it and please include any supporting stats?

Sponsored by Clare Echo

Please download the entry form from
www.ennischamber.ie/services/business-awards

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The Clare Echo logo is prominently displayed at the top, with the tagline "Proud to sponsor the category 'BEST USE OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND/OR SOCIAL MEDIA'". Below the text, a collage of newspaper front pages and digital devices (a desktop monitor, a tablet, and a smartphone) are shown, illustrating the publication's digital presence. The newspaper headlines include "Beating the same ol' drum", "Business under pressure as staff hit by Covid cases", and "ShannonDoc must provide real answers?". The background features a light blue gradient with a subtle wave pattern at the bottom.

BEST SME IN CLARE

Sponsored by Cup Print

Best SME in Clare category seeks to find Clare's best small to medium business, service or manufacturing businesses, employing less than 200 people, can apply.

In a time when talent is difficult to attract, winning 'Best SME in Clare' award will provide the winner with a valuable differentiator to attract new talent, a morale boost for existing employees, and will give confidence to existing and potential clients.

- Growth: This award is designed to identify businesses that can demonstrate consistent growth across broad business metrics including, but not limited to, financial performance, investment, growth in employees, growth in product lines or in the case of a services business growth in location/locations where services are delivered
- Success: There should be evidence of a sound strategy, considered business structure, product/service development, marketing, and business development as well conversion rates/retention rates
- Culture: The entrants should describe their culture, decision-making processes, communication, training, staff acquisition/retention metrics, and business cycles where relevant

Customers and Market differentiation: If relevant the entrants should showcase differentiation from competitors including but not limited to unique selling points, demonstrable competitor advantage, for example customer service, and showcase go-to-market/marketing strategies etc. where appropriate.

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PROFESSIONAL SERVICES EXCELLENCE AWARD

Sponsored by Bank of Ireland

This award is open to all businesses in the professional services sector that can demonstrate excellence in business practice across the full range of their activities.

Judicators will be looking for evidence of:

- Robust and sustainable management systems and procedures
- Clear evidence of ongoing employee development
- A planned growth strategy in terms of all areas of the business and suitability to service users
- Evidence of a customer focused culture that is reinforced at all levels of the business

Company size, available finance and resources will be taken into consideration by the judges. Entrants will be asked to complete an application form to provide evidence to support their submission and give the judges a clear understanding of how they meet the award criteria.

Please note that the judges are aware of the commercial sensitivity of information provided and all submitted material will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

Sponsored by Bank of Ireland

Please download the entry form from
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Best of Luck to all participants in the
Clare Business Excellence Awards

2026

From all in Bank of Ireland County Clare

Right with you

BEST MANUFACTURER IN CLARE (50+ EMPLOYEES)

Sponsored by Ei

The 'Best Manufacturer' category introduced in 2024, focuses on recognising excellence in the manufacturing sector.

Adjudication criteria to include where relevant:

- ❑ **Product Quality & Innovation:** Demonstrated high standards of product quality/Use of innovative manufacturing processes or technologies/Evidence of continuous improvement or R&D initiatives.
- ❑ **Operational Excellence:** Efficiency in production methods/Strong supply chain management/Lean manufacturing practices or waste reduction strategies
- ❑ **Customer Satisfaction:** Consistent delivery of products that meet or exceed customer expectations/Quality control and after-sales service/Testimonials or customer feedback
- ❑ **Business Growth & Performance:** Growth in sales, market share, or production output
- ❑ **Sustainability & Environmental Responsibility:** Implementation of sustainable or eco-friendly manufacturing practices/Compliance with environmental regulations/Reduction in carbon footprint or energy use
- ❑ **Workplace Culture & Staff Development:** Training, upskilling, and safety for workers/staff
- ❑ **Community & Industry Engagement:** Participation in local or industry initiatives/Contributions to the community (e.g., sponsorship, outreach programs collaboration)
- ❑ **Compliance & Accreditation:** Holding relevant certifications (e.g., ISO standards)/Adherence to health and safety regulations

Sponsored by Ei

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Corporate Headquarters,
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BEST GREEN & SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Sponsored by Rengen Power

This award is open to businesses small or large, from across all sectors that demonstrate meaningful commitment to the implementation of green and sustainable practices within the organisation.

Applicants to this category are required to demonstrate a proven commitment to environmentally friendly and ecologically responsible business decisions to help protect the environment and sustain its natural resources for current and future generations.

This award is independently judged by written submission. Judges will look for evidence of elements of the following:

- Details of specific steps your business has taken to be more environmentally-friendly
- A proven commitment to green procurement
- Has better environmental performance led to improved resource efficiency/ direct cost savings?
- Does your organisation's commitment to Green Practices help you attract and retain talent?
- Does your organisation's commitment to Green Practices help you to attract new customers?

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BEST TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN CLARE

Sponsored by TUS

This category is open to any tourism or hospitality business including visitor attractions, activity based or guided experience, museums, historic houses, gardens, exhibition centres, hotels, conference and banqueting venues.

This award will be judged initially by written submission and will be followed up by a mystery visit.

Judges will be looking for evidence of:

- Commitment to excellence across all areas of the business
- Sustainable and environmentally sound practices across all areas of the business, supporting and involving the local community
- A range of marketing activities which provide visitors with comprehensive and accessible information

Company size, available finance and resources will be taken into consideration by the judges. Entrants will be asked to complete an application form to provide evidence to support their submission and give the judges a clear understanding of how they meet the award criteria. Please provide recent photographs and brochures to support your application and where appropriate reviews and ratings.

Please note that the judges are aware of the commercial sensitivity of information provided and all submitted material will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

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BEST HOSPITALITY PROVIDER IN CLARE

Sponsored by The Shannon Airport Group

This award is designed to celebrate the best hospitality in Clare and is open to any hospitality business that can demonstrate how they have successfully created an attractive and guest friendly environment which exceeds expectation and delights customers.

This category will be judged by mystery guests who will pay particular attention to:

- The quality of the experience
- The range of facilities and the overall appeal to a broad range of visitors
- The initial impact of the business
- How the staff interact with customers and enhance the customer experience
- How the business exceeds customer expectations

Company size, available finance and resources will be taken into consideration by the judges. Entrants are asked to complete an application form to provide evidence to support their submission and give the judges a clear understanding of how they meet the award criteria.

Please note that the judges are aware of the commercial sensitivity of information provided and all submitted material will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

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BEST PLACE TO EAT IN CLARE - BEST RESTAURANT BEST PLACE TO EAT IN CLARE - BEST CAFÉ

Sponsored by AIB

Best Place to Eat in Clare; has two sub-categories to reflect the breadth of eating experiences.

They are:

1. 'Best Place to Eat – Best Restaurant in Clare'
2. 'Best Place to Eat – Best Café in Clare'

Both these awards are judged by mystery diners who will visit each eatery to sample the unique customer experience and savour the quality and taste of the food served.

Each entrant to this category will be judged across all aspects of services and facilities with particular emphasis on the food offering. The mystery diner will pay particular attention to:

- The initial impact of the business/ ambience and character
- How staff interact with customers and enhance the customer experience
- An uncompromising commitment to flavour and quality of food
- Interesting and innovative menu choices
- Excellent and appropriate food service

Company size, available finance and resources will be taken into consideration by the judges. Entrants are asked to complete an application form to provide evidence to support their submission and give the judges a clear understanding of how they meet the award criteria. Please note the judges are aware of the commercial sensitivity of information provided and all submitted material will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Entrants are asked to provide a voucher with agreed limited value to be used by the mystery diners.

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Best of luck to all participants
in the **Clare Business
Excellence Awards 2026** from
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CLARE RETAILER OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by Clean Ireland Recycling

Retailers have found themselves operating in a constant adapt and change environment over recent years. Those who have kept pace with change, invested in their business and remained forward looking are the ones that are not only surviving but thriving. But it is hard work!

This award will recognise that work ethic. It will celebrate businesses with an exceptional customer offering, that understand the power of 'experience' and customer service, businesses that innovate, meet and exceed customer needs.

Mystery shoppers will visit each entrant premises and will look for:

- How well the product range and services reflect the type and size of the store
- The provision of value-added services which exceed customer expectations
- Excellent retail standards in all areas of the store
- Innovative and exciting product range
- Excellent merchandising and display
- Welcoming and well-informed staff

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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARD

Sponsored by Xeinadin

This category is open to any business that can demonstrate their focus on, and excellence in customer service. Mystery shoppers will look at all aspects of the service provided in terms of staff interaction and the range of services on offer as appropriate to the needs of customers.

The mystery shopper will pay particular attention to:

- The initial impact of the business
- How the staff interact with customers and enhance the customer experience
- How the business exceeds customer expectations
- How the services provided delight the customers

Company size and resources will be taken into consideration by the judges. Entrants will be asked to complete an application form to provide evidence to support their submission and give the judges a clear understanding of how they meet the award criteria.

Please note that the judges are aware of the commercial sensitivity of information provided and all submitted material will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

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Best of luck from Xeinadin to all the participants in the Clare Business Excellence Awards

Expert business advice for SMEs and individuals from an Irish Top 10 Accountancy Firm.

GALA AWARDS CEREMONY

Clare Business Excellence Awards 2026 Gala Awards Ceremony will take place at The Rine Hotel, on Thursday, November 19, 2026.

MC is comedian Colm O'Regan

Tickets from Ennis Chamber w/c October 19, 2026

Email: info@ennischamber.ie

Expect a great night out!



Gala Awards Reception Sponsors: Value Centre Ennis www.valuecentre.ie

