I want to give a special thank-you to Lee McQueen, our compere for tonight.

I have to admit, having seen Lee on TV, I was a bit worried I wouldn’t match his energy and enthusiasm. So I asked one of my daughters for advice. She told me I’d be fine, because while Lee became famous for impersonating a dinosaur as an apprentice, I am a professor and a member of the House of Lords. I thought it was nice of her to be so supportive of her father, but then she said “so you’re a real dinosaur”!

Despite that crushing blow, I’m excited to be here tonight. I want to thank Nicky and Kirsty Muir for arranging this wonderful event, and all the sponsors for making it a success. I’m truly grateful to the sponsors because I was worried that if the dinner didn’t happen, Nicky would send me to her “Business Boot Camp”. That sounds even more intimidating than the Apprentice.

Actually, the Boot Camp is a good example of all the things Cotswold life does for the local economy, from helping entrepreneurs to backing family businesses. We’re even eating locally sourced food tonight. Tonight shows you don’t just celebrate innovation, you do it yourselves.

When I first met Nicky, her belief in Cotswolds manufacturing was impressive. Reading her magazine, I saw why. These awards show just how many manufacturing champions we have in the Cotswolds. Not just because you’re winning awards, but because you’re making the case for innovation and engineering every day. You’re creating jobs. Developing new ideas. Giving people opportunities. Even more than that, you’re making people’s lives easier, safer, and more sustainable.

Whether it’s Dyson making things simpler at home or the Corin Group in Cirencester transforming hip replacement surgery, Cotswold Businesses make an impact around the world. I would say the sky’s the limit, except it isn’t.

The Sentinel 1A satellite is taking a Renishaw space-encoder further than that, and helping us understand and prevent climate change.

I sometimes feel people take achievements like these for granted. They shouldn’t. Because it could easily be different. I founded Warwick Manufacturing Group in 1980. Back then, a lot of people thought British manufacturing and engineering was dying. I was often told British engineering could only survive through subsidy, or protection, or being preserved like a living fossil by the government. I knew that wasn’t true. Maybe because I was an outsider.

I first came to Britain as an apprentice with Lucas industries back in the sixties. I’d seen first hand how good British manufacturing could be. I knew what held Britain back wasn’t a lack of talent, or innovation, or initiative, but a lack of belief.

We didn’t believe we could compete with Japan or Germany. So we didn’t try to change the way we worked.

We didn’t believe we had the right workers and leaders to be successful. So we didn’t train people properly.

We didn’t believe we could turn scientific breakthroughs into new products. So people half the world away profited from ideas developed down the road.
British Manufacturing and engineering has changed enormously since I started WMG, but the biggest change isn’t in computing, or in low-carbon, or in materials. It's that companies like yours have proved you can succeed.

I don’t pretend things are easy or perfect. Business never is. There’s a lot we could do better in Britain. We need more Research and Development and innovation. We need better access to finance, so we can make the most of success. We need better infrastructure and far better skills. It’s easy to complain about all that. Actually, it’s quite right to demand change. But it’s even better to improve things yourselves.

That’s what we’ve always tried to do at WMG. And I know it’s what you do. How do I know? Because at WMG, we’ve worked alongside many of the businesses here tonight.

Take Pashley Cycles, in Stratford, who make the kind of classic bicycles you can imagine Lady Edith riding through Downton Abbey. It would only be fitting, as the real Downton village is in the Cotswolds, after all. But while they have a century of craftsmanship to their name, Pashley realise that innovation and research is key to their future growth.

Mark Swift and our small business team have worked with Pashley to explore and implement new technologies and processes. They are also developing amazing new bikes that are fast and lightweight.

Or take Versarien, nominated in three categories tonight. Versarien is taking one of the most advanced materials ever discovered by British science, Graphene, and commercialising it. With their market knowledge and capability, they’re giving business life to advances in carbon nanotechnology. Just this month, they were granted a US patent for their volume graphene platelet production process, which will help the UK economy profit from UK science.

That’s exactly the sort of commercial application of academic research I founded Warwick Manufacturing Group to encourage and support. We started with cars and engines. We have huge expertise there, and I’m proud we’re the home of the National Automotive Innovation Centre, researching everything from fuel cells to nanocomposites. And like many of you, we’ve gone beyond even nanotechnology into the digital realm.

It’s an area where, with their heritage in national security and defence, Cotswolds engineers are making important advances. L-3 TRL in Tewkesbury is at the cutting edge of electronic warfare, with products like IGUANAblue protecting crucial infrastructure from cyber attack. When your market changes as fast as digital security, you have to make skills a top priority.

At WMG we’ve helped leaders like Andrew Barnes at L-3 TRL get advanced engineering and management qualifications. That commitment to developing people runs throughout the company, which helps explain why Sam Howells is a finalist for apprentice of the year tonight.

These are just three of the companies here tonight whose work overlaps with ours at WMG.

At WMG we are focussed on helping small manufacturers capitalise on emerging technologies such as nanocomposites, advanced batteries, 3D printing and the Internet of Things. Our whole purpose to use our facilities, and our academics to help businesses developing smart factories and the products of the future.
We want to support Cotswold businesses, helping you invest in innovation, turn science into growth, and give local people skills. These are exciting times to be a manufacturer, an engineer or an innovator. Each and every company here tonight has a success worth celebrating.

In Westminster, you hear a lot of talk about the change we need in our economy. But here you’re making the real advances.

I suspect most people don’t think of manufacturing and engineering when you first mention the Cotswolds. They might think of natural beauty and golden stone. They might even think, these days, of Jeremy Clarkson and the Chipping Norton set. But you’re gradually changing that, and you’ll keep on surprising people for a while yet. Because around us, an economy is emerging where specialisation, craft and diversity integrates seamlessly into global supply chains and markets.

Where manufacturing can be clean, sustainable and connected.

Where education and quality of life is not just desirable, but essential.

Where excellence and innovation is the key to success.

Here, there are great research universities on the doorstep and clusters of advanced industry, from automotive to defence and cyber-security.

Here, you have outstanding networks, whether road, air, rail or digital.

Here, you find beauty, heritage, culture and quality of life.

I can’t think of many better places to be a manufacturer, an engineer or an innovator than right here. So it’s right that tonight Cotswold life celebrates your businesses and your growth. Because your success is bringing new life for the Cotswolds.

Thank you.