

European Customs Sports Association (ECSA) Championship



Each year the Belgian Customs invite all European countries to send athletes from their Customs Departments to compete in the Brussels 20km road race. This is a European Customs Sports Association (ECSA) championship event where athletes compete for individual and team honours.

This year, Michaela Dempsey, Malc Eadie and Stephen Shanks had the privilege to represent HMRC and the UK.

The race, which attracts 25,000 runners from Europe and beyond, is held over the May Bank Holiday weekend. It follows a tough and hilly route throughout the 20k (12.4 miles), though the splendid sights of Brussels seen en route, more than make up for the toil.

All three HMRC athletes arrived in Brussels the day before the race and so had time to take in the delights of Brussels including the various café bars and fine market stalls.

On the evening before the race the Belgian hosts formally welcomed all the athletes with a champagne reception and dinner. This was a good opportunity to meet the athletes from the other nations and to make new friends despite some language difficulties!

Race day saw 65 Customs colleagues battle it out against each other. Michaela Dempsey



(pictured) came up trumps and won an individual gold medal for the UK, in the Ladies Race clocking 1 hour 37 mins, just in front of her Italian rival.

The individual male ECSA winner was a Latvian who ran 1 hour 8 mins. However, Malc Eadie



(pictured) followed closely behind, producing a very impressive performance of 1 hour 10 minutes to finish 48th out of 25,000 and to claim an individual (ECSA) bronze. With Stephen Shanks coming in 7th place, clocking 1 hour 17 minutes, the two men claimed the First Nation Team prize just pipping the Czech Republic, their closest pursuers.

It was most definitely an excellent trip and the Belgian hospitality was second to none. A wonderful celebration dinner, held in the headquarters of the Belgian Customs, was followed by a presentation ceremony where the UK team members received their individual and team prizes. This was a great evening that made us proud to be representing HMRC and the UK.

We are already looking forward to returning to Brussels next year (if we are selected!) to reclaim our titles at what will be the 9th Annual ECSA Championship race.

Michaela Dempsey