Skills Excellence - West Midlands
Our regional newsletter for skills competitions and vocational careers experiences
Summer 2015

Welcome to the fourth edition of Skills Excellence - West Midlands, our regional newsletter for skills competitions and vocational careers events.

In this edition:

• Introducing the new West Midlands Skills Competition Network
• Celebrating West Midlands success at WorldSkills
• A view from an Independent Training Provider
• Update on Inclusive Skills competitions
• The benefits of involvement in competition
This newsletter is our first since the election and we know that the next few years will be challenging for further education as we support the achievement of the Government’s ambitious target for apprenticeships against a declining funding resource. What we know for certain however, is that there will continue to be a strong emphasis on increasing skills levels to support a growing economy. The value of excellent technical and professional education will remain critically important.

Nowhere is excellence in skills better demonstrated than through our elite competitions and next month sees Team UK competing at the highest level at WorldSkills 2015 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Several young people from colleges and providers in the West Midlands made it through a rigorous selection process to become members of Team UK. We wish them and the rest of the team every success and a host of medals.

But we know it’s not just at elite level where the value of skills competitions lie. We’re seeing more and more colleges and providers embedding competition activity in their teaching and learning strategies where it’s having an impact on motivation and achievement as well as supporting young people develop a wide range of employability skills.

Through the AoC regional office in the West Midlands we will be continuing to support colleges and providers to make competition opportunities available to all. And through our regional advisory group for WorldSkills we will be looking to develop a framework for further partnership working between all those who value excellence in skills including colleges, providers and employers.

I hope you find this issue of Skills Excellence a useful read – you’ll find links and contact details included with many of the articles but if you would like to follow up on any of the information here please do contact the AoC West Midlands regional office, details of which you’ll find at the back.

Finally just a reminder that The Skills Show will take place this year at the NEC on 19 - 21 November. It is an amazing opportunity for your learners, and I urge you to encourage as many of them as possible to attend (details are contained in this edition).

Best wishes

Graham Morley Principal, South Staffordshire College, and Chair of the West Midlands WorldSkills Regional Group
On Thursday 22 May 2015, 21 Students from across the UK competed in the annual national “Footsteps to the Future” Competitions held at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College.

A total of 136 students from 11 colleges travelled to the College’s Nuneaton Campus to compete in a variety of competitions including catering, floristry, media, motor vehicle, and hairdressing.

The competition is in its seventh year and is aimed specifically at students who are on foundation level courses.

Kieran Salisbury, who is studying the Level 1 Body and Paint course at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College said: “During our competition we had to design a vehicle that had the environment in mind, with the aim of reducing carbon footprints. The day was a great chance to use our skills and take part in a team building exercise.”

Margaret Lane, a lecturer from Derwen College said: “This was an excellent opportunity for the students to develop and transfer their skills, all of them thoroughly enjoyed the event.”

Marion Plant OBE, Principal and Chief Executive of the College said: “Congratulations to all students who took part in the event. It was so inspiring to see the amazing talent and work produced throughout the day. Participating in competitions is an important part of teaching, learning and assessment in our Colleges. Competitions develop skills, raise aspirations and are an important part of preparation for life and work. We hope this event has helped students to aim high as they progress to further level training or work.”

With the support of North Warwickshire and Hinckley and Derwen College, a number of other institutions are hosting Inclusive Skills competitions for the first time this spring providing a unique opportunity for learners to compete in a wide range of subject areas.

These events are part of a wider move to fully embed entry and foundation level opportunities into the world of skills competitions. The Inclusive Skills website now includes regional tabs so that all information relating to these competitions, wherever they are taking place, can now be found in one place.

The final part of the jigsaw is now in place in that it has been agreed that the finals of some competitions will be held at The Skills Show in November of this year.
Following the recent Team UK Selection Competitions, 41 individuals have been selected to compete in São Paulo in 37 skills ranging from landscape gardening to web design and welding. All were chosen based on a high personal skill level, competitive attitude and maturity, and have all received performance training from experts at Loughborough University, who have previously worked with talented individuals from the British Olympic team and England Rugby squad.

Many of the team members started their journey to Brazil when they entered the WorldSkills UK Skills Competitions and competed in national finals held at The Skills Show, the nation’s largest skills and careers event, in Birmingham in 2013 and 2014.

Massive congratulations go to the following West Midlands competitors who will be representing the UK in São Paulo later this year.

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<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Training Provider</th>
<th>Apprentice</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bricklaying</td>
<td>Ryan Stevens</td>
<td>Shrewsbury College</td>
<td>Completed Apprenticeship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Floristry</td>
<td>Louisa Cooper</td>
<td>South Staffordshire College</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Sheet Metal Technology</td>
<td>Harley Brian</td>
<td>KMF</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
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<td>CNC Turning</td>
<td>Alex Elton</td>
<td>North Warwickshire and Hinckley College</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
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WorldSkills São Paulo takes place from 11 to 16 August 2015. To find out more about WorldSkills UK Skills Competitions, visit http://worldskillsuk.org.
Book now for FREE entry at The Skills Show 2015

Be inspired by an enormous range of jobs and careers on show where visitors can get hands on and have a go at skills experiences

Speak directly with hundreds of employers, colleges and training providers and receive expert careers advice from the National Careers Service advisers

Hear from motivational speakers about the world of work and see demonstrations from real people doing real jobs

Witness the UK’s best young talent at the WorldSkills UK Skills Competitions finals and learn about a wide range of skills, careers, apprenticeships, education, training & more!

Leadership opportunities at The Skills Show

UK businesses have identified leadership skills as the most important area for employees to develop in order for the economy to grow over the next five years. In fact, 62% of those questioned believe the ability to motivate and shape a team will be the biggest single driver for business expansion moving forwards. But how do you develop your leadership skills without formal training? The Skills Show has the answer!

The Skills Show’s organisers, Find a Future, are currently seeking 15 exceptional people to become volunteer team leaders for its 2015 event, taking place at the NEC, Birmingham from 19 to 21 November. To ensure that everything runs smoothly, the event is supported by a team of around 500 volunteers, led by a talented group of individuals whose role is to motivate and mentor them.

“Our volunteer team leaders are a crucial part of the team which stages The Skills Show,” explains Miriam Farley, Senior Content and Experience Manager “guiding and motivating their groups of volunteers to ensure that everything at such a key national event runs smoothly.

The team leaders enable us to deliver a smooth and positive experience for both visitors and other volunteers, while developing their own management and leadership skills at the same time.

In addition to giving individuals the chance to gain substantial quantities of leadership skills, managerial training, and work experience which is vital for any CV, our volunteer team leaders meet hundreds of employers during the event and receive a number of formal qualifications at the conclusion of the show. These include certification in first aid, team leadership, a People First customer services qualification based on the 2012 Olympic programme, plus specialised recognition in areas such as Health and Safety.”

A training and development programme is in place to maximise the benefits for all volunteer team leaders who are expected to be on site at the NEC, Birmingham from 13 to 22 November 2015.

For more information, and details on how to apply, please visit The Skills Show website.
10 March 2015 saw the inaugural meeting of the newly established Regional Skills Competition Network. Emerging as a result of the feedback received from its recent CPD programme, AoC West Midlands sees this as a way of improving communication amongst organisations involved in competition, enabling the sharing of best practice and resulting in improvements in quality.

In June the meeting took the form of a CPD session at which attendees had the opportunity to see competition in action and to hear first hand from the experts on how they organise competition days and maximise the benefits to the college as a whole.

Simon Winder, Deputy Director from South and City College Birmingham, took delegates on a tour of the Regional SkillBuild finals which were taking place on the day of the network meeting. He explained how he involves local schools as well as employers and suppliers from the area to maximise the impact of the event and get the best possible experience for the competitors and the staff accompanying them.

The network will take place termly, with 2015/16 meetings scheduled for:
- Tuesday 3 November 2015 at Sandwell College
- Tuesday 8 March 2016 at Dudley College
- Wednesday 15 June 2016 at CWT Chamber Training
AoC West Midlands Skills Competition CPD programme continues

On 21 May 2015, delegates attended a CPD session which enabled them to see foundation and entry level competitions taking place at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. Attendees were given the chance to watch competition in action and to ask questions of experienced staff.

On 3 July 2015, Nova Training hosted a training day aimed at providing practical advice to colleges and Independent Training Providers on how to run competitions. The day covered all aspects of planning, and running a competition from producing a brief and mark scheme to organising parking and dealing with VIPs. A link to the resources can be found on the Skills Excellence page of the AoC West Midlands website.

There has been lots of positive feedback from delegates who have attended the sessions to date:

“A fantastic opportunity to see competitions in action, network with other colleagues and share best practice. There is a real excitement about the benefits competitions can bring to students, staff and partnerships with employers and other agencies.”

“A useful and informative session that should translate easily into our curriculum.”

“Inspired me to have the confidence to hold competitions and showed me the benefits to our students and our businesses.”

“The CPD event that I attended was very inspirational for me. I have now developed an enthusiasm to return to my own organisation and plan future events. Well hosted and informative. Thank you”
Why get involved in competition?

FE News recently published a free supplement specifically about skills competition. It is a really worthwhile read and covers a range of topics including the impact of skills competitions on standards cross college, the “ripple effect”, the involvement of ILPs in skills competition, and first hand testimony from competitors and staff about the benefits they have gained from being involved in competition.

The full document can be viewed by clicking here.

Here are a few interesting extracts;

“Whole college participation in skills competitions has been catalytic in developing a culture of ambition, competitiveness and high performance, making a significant contribution to the consistently good and improving Ofsted grades at each college.”
Marion Plant OBE, Principal of North Warwickshire and Hinckley College

“It gives our competitors the best training and the best opportunity to compete at the highest levels, but it’s good for the students at the college too. I do a lot of development with the staff as well, giving them intensive training on more advanced equipment, and they in turn change their curriculum in order to use it.

Being a training manager is just amazing. These are young people with the fire, passion and drive, who want to do well, and they’re so motivated that working with them is a pleasure.

You see them develop and change over the process. They become much more mature, much more confident at what they are doing.”
Ian Thompson from Coleg Llandrillo and Sue Simpson from Style Training, Southport on the benefits of being a training manager

“There are countries clamouring at ministerial, prime ministerial and presidential level to be part of the WorldSkills movement....I would find it extraordinarily strange if the UK took its foot off the accelerator of developing skills competitions at a college, local, regional, and national level.”
Simon Bartley, WorldSkills International president

Responding to the legislation announced during the Queen’s Speech, Martin Doel, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC), said:

“The legislation proposed in the Queen’s Speech clearly demonstrates the Government’s commitment to rebuilding the economy through professional and technical education.

Whilst no one is under the illusion that the next few years will not be challenging there is perhaps an opportunity to use skills competitions as a way of developing the vital soft skills, resilience, time management and self confidence that employers most often say they are looking for.”
We first became broadly aware of the value of competitions when we were approached to exhibit at the first Skills Show in Birmingham and through our involvement with the West Midlands Training Provider Network. Having attended The Skills Show, staff and learners became more enthused by the benefits of competitions and the aspirational effect it has on young people.

Since our involvement, our staff have attended various training sessions that have been operated by AoC West Midlands and also consulted with some FE Colleges who run regular competitions.

It is our intention to run competitions at various levels to ensure they are inclusive for young people who are just at the beginning of a vocational pathway and for those who have progressed further although the logistics of having 19 sites across the West Midlands is proving challenging! We have now formulated an internal Competition Strategy and we are imminently due to launch our first internal competition geared at young people participating on a Study Programme. The competition focus is around web and graphic design and the use of social media engagement.

As a company we continually review our recruitment strategies, including our printed, web based and social marketing. We are therefore looking to use the competition as a vehicle to put young people at the heart of our recruitment. Learners will be able to submit proposed webpage designs promoting courses, learner testimonials, social media campaigns, printed materials etc. These will be judged by an internal panel (to be determined) with the winners announced at our annual Learner Conference in November 2015.

Furthermore we have made a commitment to identify, support and submit candidates to other local and national competitions. In 2015 we submitted two candidates for Auto Refinishing both of whom progressed to regional heats and ultimately came 10th and 11th in the Country – something we are all very proud of.
Triumph for West Midlands and West Yorkshire Care Workers at WorldSkills 2015 UK Health and Social Care Competition

Competitors from Shipley College in Saltaire and Coventry based CWT Chamber Training, scooped the first prizes in the two initial heats in this year’s WorldSkills UK 2015 Health and Social Care Competition, which took place at South and City College Birmingham, and is part of the world’s largest vocational skills competition.

The heats were held on the 13 and 14 May 2015 and the first 30 of this year’s 79 competitors from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, were able to demonstrate their skills in delivering health care in a competitive environment.

The competitions aim to find the best adult health care workers in the country. Regional heats took place between May and June, with the eight highest scorers from across the country going forward to the National Finals at The Skills Show, being held at the NEC in Birmingham this November.

Over the course of the day, competitors needed to demonstrate the delivery of excellent health care in a mix of written tests and live activities, assessed by a panel of expert judges from across the country.

The activities, which included working with older people and people with learning disabilities, were devised by Profiles4Care Ltd to replicate situations which health and social care workers would be expected to face in their everyday roles.

Fredrikka Walker (20, centre above) from CWT Chamber Training who won 1st prize winner in Heat 1 said:

“I thought it was great fun, a good learning experience and challenging. I really enjoyed it and meeting new people. Even though we were competing we got on really well.”
Contact Us

To attend the next West Midlands Skills Competition Network, please email Pal Sohi.

If you would like to send in any articles for inclusion in our next newsletter, please send all stories and accompanying images to Caroline Southall-Chell.

For any questions, comments or queries relating to this programme, please contact AoC West Midlands Regional CPD Skills Project Manager Jayne Warman.

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