

Four young Welsh experts to represent UK in the world's largest Global Skills competition

Joseph Massey, 23, from Coleg Cambria; Alfie Hopkin, 18, from Llanelli, Elizabeth Forkuoh, 20, from Llanelli and Ethan Davies, 21, from Mynydd Isa have been recognised as the UK's most highly skilled young people in their industry, and will travel almost 5,000 miles to the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC) to compete against the best students, apprentices and employees in the world.

Held every two years, WorldSkills International sees more than one thousand young people, aged 18 to 25, come together from seventy-seven countries to compete for medals in fifty-one skill competitions, including CNC Milling, Restaurant Service, Web Design and Aeronautical Engineering.

As part of Team UK, these four Welsh youngsters will showcase their skills by demonstrating their technical abilities in specific tasks, which they study or conduct in their workplace, over the course of six days.

Elizabeth said:

“WorldSkills has enabled me to travel the UK and receive training from some of the best restaurants in the country. For example I've trained at the Ritz and Michel Roux Jnr's two Michelin star restaurant, where they actually offered me a job!

“I'm so excited to be able to compete on an international level, it's something I've dreamed about for years now and I can hardly believe I'll be going. Being part of the competition is such an amazing experience. From the people I've met and the new skills I've learnt, to the places I've travelled to and worked in, none of it would have been possible without WorldSkills.”

Joseph, Alfie, Elizabeth and Ethan were invited to compete in the selection process after excelling at the Skills Competition Wales and WorldSkills UK National Competitions, the finals of which take place at The Skills Show each November.

Backed by the Welsh Government through the European Social Fund, these competitions promote the importance of developing a highly skilled workforce and world-class individuals.

Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James said:

“Congratulations to all four competitors on their way to represent the nation. The number of Welsh members in Team UK is a testament not only to their hard work and determination but also the support from their families, and training from Welsh colleges, training providers and employers.

“Wales has been competing in WorldSkills for many years and has nurtured some of the most highly-skilled young people in a range of industries. Taking part in WorldSkills competitions enables the whole of Wales to benefit. Not only do competitors return to the country to inspire others to follow in their footsteps but they also bring their knowledge and experience to the workplace, helping develop skills and setting high industry standards.

“However, the journey neither starts nor ends with WorldSkills international – there is a cycle of programme development behind Welsh involvement in competitions which allows colleges and training providers to benchmark and quality assure themselves against the best in the world, encouraging continuous professional development and raising our teaching standards. We wish Joseph, Alfie, Elizabeth and Ethan good luck in Abu Dhabi and look forward to following their journey.”

[New figures show the number of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales fell during 2016](#)

Figures published today [27/04/17] from the Annual Population Survey (APS) show that in the twelve months ending 31 December 2016, 8.5% of 16-18 year olds were estimated to be NEET compared with 9.6% at the end of 2015. This represents 9,100 young people compared with 10,200.

During the same period ending 31 December 2016, 17.1% of 19-24 year olds (42,000 people) were estimated to be NEET, against 18.6% (46,600) at the year ending 31 December 2015.

The figures also include data recently published by Careers Wales which shows the number of Year 11 leavers from schools in Wales known to be NEET also decreased between 2015 and 2016 and now stands at 2.0% (619) compared to 2.8% (911) in 2015.

Welcoming the results the Minister said:

“Reducing the number of young people not in employment, education or training is a key priority for this government and we are committed to ensuring our policies and programmes continue to support young peoples’ educational and employment needs.

“For example, our Youth Engagement and Progression Framework supports local authorities and other organisations to put systems in place to reduce the number of 16-18 year old NEET young people in Wales and today’s report shows we are producing good results.”

A number of Welsh Government schemes help young people into work, such as Jobs Growth Wales. Supported by the European Structural Fund, Jobs Growth Wales provides unemployed young people aged 16-24 with a job opportunity for six months.

Since launching in 2012, almost 15,000 job vacancies were filled through scheme 1 of the programme, with a further 2,365 filled under scheme 2 by March 2017.

The Minister added:

“While we are always looking at ways to improve our approaches to ensure they remain responsive to changing needs, these figures clearly show our focus on supporting young people into training or further education and into work are proving effective and we are delivering for Wales.”

Carl Sargeant welcomes Help to Buy success

The majority of homes purchased through Help to Buy Wales were to first time buyers, accounting for 75 per cent of total completions.

Communities and Children’s Secretary Carl Sargeant has welcomed the figures, saying the Welsh Government’s ambitious housing programme is about providing people with affordable, safe, warm and secure homes in sustainable communities.

Carl Sargeant said:

“I am pleased that our Help to Buy Wales investment has given many first time buyers the help they need to get their foot on the

property ladder.

“The scheme has also helped provide the Welsh housing market with essential momentum and created valuable jobs.

“Last year we announced we would invest up to £290m in a second phase of the scheme to support the construction of more than 6,000 homes which will be part of our target of an additional 20,000 homes during this term of government. This reflects the success of the scheme in providing a route into more affordable home ownership, especially for first-time buyers. It has played a huge role in generating confidence within the housing sector and supporting private housing development.”

[New funding lays the foundations for Wales Co-operative Housing initiative](#)

Co-operative housing is a model where groups of people collectively own and manage their accommodation, often with support from a registered social landlord. The approach offers affordable housing in a climate where mortgages are difficult to get and house prices too high for many buyers. Co-operative Housing provides another choice of housing and contributes to the Welsh Government’s target of providing 20,000 affordable homes during this term of government.

The funding will help to scale up the project which has already helped to deliver 99 homes across Wales and is supporting the delivery of a further 75 by developing expertise in different co-operative models and providing advice to developers and co-operative groups.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“This funding will allow the Wales Co-operative Centre to build on the progress they have already made in supporting the development of housing co-operatives in Wales. It is just one of the innovative models of housing the Welsh Government is supporting that will contribute to our ambitious target to deliver 20,000 additional affordable homes in Wales over this term of government.”

Derek Walker, Chief Executive of the Wales Co-operative Centre, said:

“The funding from the Welsh Government is critical to building on the excellent progress that has already been made with co-operative

housing here in Wales. It is clear to see that the people and communities across Wales have grasped with enthusiasm the opportunity for co-operative housing.

“The Wales Co-operative Centre will use this funding from the Welsh Government to pay for experts to work with local co-operative housing projects and help them with the range of support they need.”

During this week’s annual TAI Conference held in Cardiff, the Wales Co-operative Centre has also launched a Co-operative Housing Pilot Toolkit, developed with funding from the Welsh Government during the last financial year. It is aimed at helping community groups, housing associations, co-ops, local authorities and others in the initial stages of considering how to develop new co-operative & community-led homes (CCLH). You can download this pilot toolkit by visiting:

<http://wales.coop/a-guide-to-developing-housing-co-ops/> (external link).

The Co-operative Housing in Wales project has also published its new strategy this month ‘Building homes, creating communities, changing lives’, which outlines how the programme will continue to promote and support an increasing role for co-operative housing in meeting housing need in Wales. The strategy can be viewed at: <http://wales.coop/helping-people-set-up-housing-coops/> (external link).

[Avian Influenza Prevention Zone to end on 30 April](#)

The Cabinet Secretary has taken this decision based on an updated veterinary risk assessment conducted by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). However, the temporary suspension on gatherings of some species of birds will remain as additional evidence is considered.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

“Last December I declared the whole of Wales an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone in response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N8 outbreaks being reported across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. This was a precautionary measure to minimise the risk of poultry and other captive birds being infected by wild birds.

“We have been closely monitoring this situation and APHA has been

preparing updated outbreak risk assessments. The most recent evidence-based veterinary risk assessment concluded there remains a Low – Medium risk of resident wild waterfowl being infected with H5N8. Meanwhile, the exposure assessment risk for poultry farms is Low, but heightened, and will depend on the biosecurity measures on each farm. This level is consistent with November 2016, when disease was present across Europe in sporadic outbreaks and occasional wild bird findings were being reported.

“Therefore, I am pleased to announce, following the expiry of the current Avian Influenza Prevention Zone on 30 April, this will not be replaced. Whilst I am sure this is welcome news it is important to remember avian influenza remains a constant and real threat to our poultry and other captive birds.”

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Christianne Glossop added:

“I would like to stress the need for all keepers of poultry and other domestic captive birds to remain alert for signs of the disease and to contact their private veterinarians if they have any concerns. If anyone suspects disease they should contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency immediately.

“It is essential all keepers maintain effective biosecurity practices, such as considering and updating self assessment forms, cleansing and disinfecting all clothing, equipment and vehicles (using approved disinfectants) and implementing effective pest control measures to minimise the opportunities of contact between their birds and wild birds and wild life.

“We can all play a part in supporting the ongoing surveillance by reporting any findings of dead wild birds to the GB helpline on 03459 335577. In particular, any wild ducks, wild geese, swans, gulls or birds of prey and where more than five birds of any species are found dead in the same location. We must also ensure we all comply and respect the biosecurity measures put in place by poultry or other captive bird keepers.

“I would also like to take this opportunity to remind all poultry keepers with 50 birds or more they must register their flocks on the Poultry Register and strongly encourage all poultry keepers, including those with fewer than 50 birds, to register. This will ensure they can be contacted immediately, via email or text update, in an avian disease outbreak enabling them to protect their flock at the earliest opportunity.

“If poultry or other captive birds are being let outside after a prolonged period of being housed I would recommend keepers consult their private veterinarian on the health impacts.”