



VQ Day

Celebrating Vocational Achievement

Diwrnod VQ

Dathlu Llwyddiant Galwedigaethol

Talents at Work • Doniau ar Waith



Jeff Cuthbert, Deputy Minister for Skills

Across the UK, Vocational Qualifications (VQ) Day celebrates individual successes across a wide range of economic sectors, taking in accountancy, catering, construction, the creative industries, education, engineering, management, science, technology and more. Coinciding with VQ Day 2011, this publication profiles diverse and impressive achievements of individuals, home-grown in Wales. What they all have in common is a taste for hands-on learning, learning on the job or

running their own businesses. And just as importantly, they have the drive and passion to succeed. Guest of honour at the VQ Learner of the Year Award ceremony on 22 June 2011 in Cardiff was Jeff Cuthbert, Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Skills. He said: "Vocational qualifications have never been more important to the economy and the individual. They help us deliver the trained, talented employees that Welsh businesses need to thrive.

"As the Deputy Minister for Skills I am determined to see vocational qualifications be recognised alongside academic qualifications for their value to the individual and society. That is why Vocational Qualifications Day is so important and I'm delighted to see it establish itself as an annual event. It is vital that we celebrate the success people achieve through their vocational qualifications in the same way we celebrate academic achievements. VQ Day gives us that focus."

VQ LEARNER OF THE YEAR

WINNER

The youngest Michelin starred chef?

Luke Thomas is a force to be reckoned with. He is passionate and driven. He is aiming to be the youngest Michelin starred chef in the world. He is notching up experience with the most famous and well-respected chefs in the world at an incredible pace. He has secured his own personal sponsors to travel around the world to learn different catering specialisms from the best. Dubai is his next stop, to hone his seafood skills.

Two years ago, whilst at Yale College Wrexham, he was crowned Springboard Future Chef of the Year 2009.

He says that winning the competition opened many doors and the list of chefs he has since worked with runs like a Who's Who of catering, including Heston Blumenthal, Gary Rhodes and Gordon Ramsay.



Luke Thomas

He's worked at the premier Barbados resort, Sandy Lane and cooked for Prince Charles. During his time with the Individual Restaurant Company he secured placements at some of the top-rated restaurants in the world, including two and three Michelin-starred restaurants in Denmark, USA and the UK.

Ian Donald, Director the Individual Restaurant Company who has mentored Luke said: "Luke has all the enthusiasm and passion of a young person with a dream but the attitude and determination of a man on a mission.

I look forward to seeing this young man grow into a world-renowned master of his craft."

He is now looking to invest in his own restaurant which he intends to open in two years' time.

And now for the most breathtaking news of all. It was only last year that he was still a pupil at Connah's Quay High School. Luke Thomas is just 17 years old.

VQ LEARNER OF THE YEAR

WINNER

Hold that magazine cover!

Melissa Jenkins is ambitious and entrepreneurial. Having achieved top marks in her National Diploma in Photography at Bridgend College, she stayed at the college to study a BA degree in Photography. She finished her course this year and has just been informed that the standard of her work has gained her an outstanding first class honours.

Apart from her excellent photography skills, what is being noticed in the industry is her distinct flair for business.

This year, Melissa won the Nikon Student of the Year Foundation Award. This is one of the most high profile awards that any student can win.

The Nikon Foundation offers final year photography students an opportunity to win the ultimate career enhancing boost – three month's paid employment as a photographer's assistant to renowned fashion and celebrity photographer John Wright. Living in London, the winner also receives living expenses and a top of the range Nikon professional camera and lens kit worth thousands.



Melissa Jenkins

John Wright, who was the main judge for the Nikon Award, said: "Melissa's work really stood out for me. It wasn't just the high standard of her images but her appreciation of photography as a business and understanding for the need to promote your work via multiple platforms. I think she will fit very well into my team."

Her work has been published in What Digital Camera? and other national magazines. She's had a 10 page feature in the international lifestyle magazine Sublime as well as having her work prominently displayed on the highly coveted front cover. At the same time, she has been setting up her own freelance fashion photography business and shooting top fashion designers' new collections for London Fashion Week. Vogue recently informed her they'd like to see her.

Champion plumber



Lee James Cuthill

Lee James Cuthill won the Wales final of the SkillPLUMB competition earlier this year. Having been crowned Welsh Champion Plumber, he is looking forward to the opportunity to represent Wales at the UK final to be hosted in Leeds in September 2011.

Lee is considered an exceptional student by his tutors at Yale College, Wrexham, where he is studying for an NVQ level 3 in plumbing. He is always keen to share his experiences and skill development with other students, and is a credit to the college and his employer D I Jones Heating from Ruthin.

SkillPLUMB is the UK skills competition organised by the Sector Skills Council SummitSkills for UK colleges, employers and training providers' finest competitors. The UK final, which lasts for a number of days, brings together the winner from each national competition.

Decorating China

Emily Evans is known to her tutors at Neath Port Talbot College as a truly exceptional student. After only three months tuition on the Advanced Craft Award in Painting and Decorating, she requested to sit the external examination and achieved a merit grade at the first attempt.

Last year, Emily won a gold medal in the Wales Skillbuild final, achieving one of the highest scores ever seen in the competition.

This year, Emily moved on to the international stage. In March 2011, she represented Wales in China as part of the first ever Wales-China Skills Exchange.

One of ten students from six colleges from Wales to showcase vocational skills, she demonstrated her painting and decorating skills to students from 12 colleges in Chongqing – the fastest growing city in the world.



Emily Evans

VQ AWARD FINALIST

Eleri breaks the plastering mould

Eleri Evans is an unconventional and distinctive plasterer. A single mother of three, she first tried her hand at other things before finding her true vocation.

She started investing in her future once her children started school. By now, she works as a full-time plasterer, she has achieved qualifications at level 3 at Neath Port Talbot College through Pathways Training, and she's been congratulated by The Plasterers' Company for coming in the top four in the search for the UK Plastering Student of the Year.

Through her achievements, her world has been turned around. She has confidence in her own abilities, she is fully employed and working to top UK standards, her children are proud of her and she says that she has not finished yet. Studying for the NVQ3, says Eleri, has opened her to further study.

Ian Lumsdaine, Deputy Director for Skills at Neath Port Talbot College said: "I am convinced she represents a true role model to women who may be interested in pursuing a career in construction."



Eleri Evans

A career on the waves

Superfast learner Adam Edgar, 20, from Capel Curig, won a gold award in boatbuilding at the SkillsCompetition Wales contest in March this year, just months after starting a course in the subject.

Looking for a change of pace from outdoor sports, Adam, a ski instructor, enrolled on an NVQ in boatbuilding maintenance and repair at Coleg Llandrillo in September 2010, little realising it would lead to a whole new direction in life. He said: "After doing a little bit of sailing, I wanted to know more about how boats work. I definitely want to go into boat building now though. It has already taught me so much, and winning the competition has shown me I am actually quite good at it!"

Barry Liles, Principal of Coleg Sir Gâr and Wales' official WorldSkills Champion, said: "These competitions provide an excellent

opportunity for our skilled young people to show that they can be world beaters. They can put Wales, as a small nation, on the map by demonstrating the quality of their work and showcasing the calibre of the Welsh workforce generally."



Adam Edgar

VQ AWARD FINALIST

Forensic scientist always looking for new angles

Having completed the first year of A Levels at school, Christopher Lewis wanted a vocational qualification. He was interested in science and the law and so enrolled at Bridgend College for a BTEC National Diploma in Applied Science (Forensic Science). He went on to achieve three distinction grades – the top grades possible, as well as the Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma.

Still a young man, Christopher has shouldered longstanding family responsibilities. Despite difficult personal circumstances, he went the extra mile at the college, using his talents and energies creatively to develop new initiatives and help others. He was instrumental in the development of student-led elements of his course, inspiring both staff and students and he was awarded the college's overall student Award for Commitment to Study.

Throughout his studies he worked over 30 hours a week as a supervisor in a supermarket to support his future degree studies in Forensic Science.

His tutor, Sara Davies, explains that communication skills and other related studies helped Christopher become more confident, which helped him move into retail management, where confidence is critical. Christopher was also the inspiration between the college's 'Crime Week', for which he was interviewed by ITV. He went on to play a key role in the college achieving the national Beacon Award for Science – an award coveted by colleges across the UK.

Sara Davies said: "Christopher is the most memorable and inspirational student I've ever known. He has inspired us more than he will ever know."



Christopher Lewis

VQ AWARD FINALIST

Webwide David represents UK on world stage

David Bowen from Llandysul, who's being studying for a National Diploma in IT at Coleg Sir Gâr, is on a busy schedule.

Last year he won first place in the Wales-final of the web design competition organised by UK Skills. Then, following three days of intense competition which involved building a fully-functional website including animation and documentation, he became one of only two competitors from Wales to be selected for the UK Squad.

He is now preparing to represent the UK at WorldSkills 2011 in October. His preparations include honing his competition skills at national events in France and, soon, in Australia. Despite his jet-setting and his ambassadorial role in motivating up and coming potential WorldSkills competitors of the future, he still finds time to study and to work for a web design company. Never one to rest on his hands, he's shown an



David Bowen

entrepreneurial spirit since he was aged just 14 when he first went into business, selling web-based creations through his website. David has also been invited by the Welsh Government to attend the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to celebrate young people's achievements.

Coleg Sir Gâr lecturer Mike David said that David is doing a fantastic job of representing the college and IT training. "Of the 200 UK Squad members, David is the youngest so we're very proud of him."

From low to high in two years

Lewis Brown, now 19, is considering his university choices. Nothing truly remarkable for some, maybe. But Lewis' learning journey over the past two years has been pretty amazing.

Leaving school with poor GCSE grades, Lewis enrolled on a Level 1 engineering course at Coleg Glan Hafren. His prospects appeared limited. But in just a couple of years, he's gained good grades in GCSE Maths and English as well as Levels

1, 2 and 3 courses in engineering and mathematics. This year Lewis is completing his National Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering and has won Coleg Glan Hafren's Engineering and Construction Faculty Student of the Year Award.

His UCAS application has reaped a number of offers on Honours Degree courses and he's now on a par with high-flying A level pupils.

VQ AWARD FINALIST

Awarded at Buckingham Palace

Benjamin Morgan, a 20 year old motor vehicle student at Deeside College, has coped with serious personal upheavals and still achieved beyond his peers.

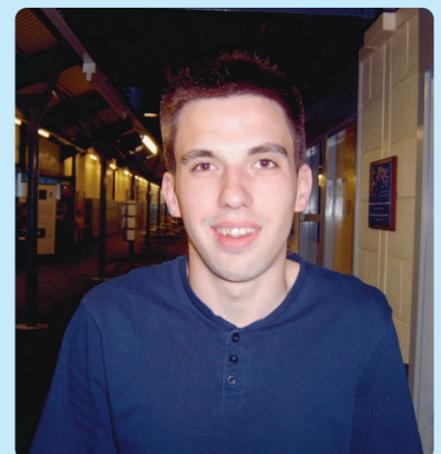
He has been making an impression since he was just 15. At the end of a work placement arranged for him by his school, the employer offered him a job. Since then, a lot more people have taken notice of unassuming Benjamin. His employer, Delwyn Humphries from Humphries Garage in Flintshire, entrusts Ben to run the workshop when he's away. He says "Ben has been the best employee to

date. He is passionate about his work and the quality of his workmanship is always first class. My customers ask for him. I know when I am away the place is in very safe hands with Ben."

Ben is an outstanding learner. He has invested his own money in new equipment in order to have more opportunities to practice on a wider range of vehicles. He is getting known in the trade, having made a lot of contacts through his college and employer, and he intends to open his own business next year. The awarding body, City & Guilds,

has certainly taken note. This year, he was invited to a reception at Buckingham Palace where he received a prestigious Lion Award and also named "FE Learner of the Year" by City & Guilds and n Buckingham Palace. This was a crowning glory, having previously been awarded a City & Guilds Medal of Excellence.

On top of that, he was named a finalist in the VQ Learner of the Year Award 2011 as part of the VQ Day celebrations on 22 June 2011.



Benjamin Morgan

Long Beach, Florida and TV all part of the mix for hairdresser Nick

Nicholas Petrakis is known to millions from reality TV shows but his feet are firmly on the ground.

"I had no interest in school but when anything to do with hairdressing was mentioned I absorbed all the information quickly because I had a passion for it. It was agreed with the school that it was in my best interests to be put on full time vocational education" says Nick, now 24.

He found a work placement in a hairdressing salon in Cardiff and ISA Training helped him achieve NVQ Levels 1 & 2 and a foundation apprenticeship in hairdressing. At 19, Nick moved to London to train with Steiner Cruise Liners and, when his training was complete, he made Long Beach, Florida his base. A year later, personal reasons

brought him back to Cardiff, where he became manager of a salon aged just 20. After two years, he moved to Vanilla Rooms as Designer Stylist, completed an Apprenticeship in Hairdressing (a level 3 qualification) with ISA Training, and then TV called.

Last year, a client nominated him for the Nation's Favourite Hairdresser competition. Out of the thousands of other nominees from all across the UK, Nick won a pretty amazing second. He also reached the last 18 of E4's Great British Hairdresser, televised in April 2011. Despite the kudos his fame has brought him and the salon, Nick is keener to pass on his skills to others, rather than bask in personal glory. He has recently completed his A1 Award and will soon start assessing and mentoring young stylists.



Nicholas Petrakis

New career and gold at 50

Karen Matthews from Ruthin has shown that age and personal hardships are no barrier to a radical career change after establishing herself as one of Wales' best trainee pastry chefs at the age of 50. After many years as an IT sales manager, she decided she needed to try something new after slipped discs following a nasty car crash left her unable to work.

Within months she has become one of the rising stars of the culinary world. Beating off challenges from rivals across the nation, Karen recently won a gold medal at the SkillsCompetition Wales Cooking and Restaurant Services contest. Currently studying for an NVQ Level 3 Patisserie & Confectionery course at Coleg Llandrillo Cymru, Karen is enjoying the experience so much that she's determined to make it her career.

Entering the **skills**competition Wales event has transformed the way that she thinks about food and has given her new confidence in her culinary skills. She said: "I have always fancied myself as a bit of a foodie, but, when you are getting on a bit like me, you think that learning is out of the question. I was really nervous when I enrolled, but there are actually a few mature students in my class and we all really enjoy it. I am thrilled to win gold, and it goes to show that age is no barrier!"



Karen Matthews

Top Swiss hotel next springboard

Barry College student Lewis Barnett, 26, has gone from building site to his dream job in a leading Swiss hotel restaurant after completing a course that encourages top establishments to take on apprentices. Lewis had always been interested in a career as a chef, and enrolled on a Pathways to Apprenticeship programme in Hospitality & Catering - a flexible college-based programme with a strong work experience element.

He is now building himself a strong foundation but it wasn't always the case for him: "I used to work in the building industry, but when the recession hit work was not easy to come by," he explained. "I was on site one day and I saw an old guy there, working away. It was

hammering down with rain and I thought 'This really is not for me'."

Success in learning brings on more learning challenges to continue up the career ladder. Having already mastered the transition from building to catering, his next task is to learn German! After his catering course Lewis was taken on full time by the Cardiff Marriott hotel and he is now about to follow the Cardiff Marriott's head chef over to the chain's Renaissance Hotel in Zurich.

"It's going to be a challenge, especially with the language as I only speak a little bit of German," Lewis said. "But I'm really looking forward to it - it's the next step for me and a perfect opportunity".



Lewis Barnett

Dressing the stars of stage and screen

Samantha Jones and Kate Barton have put to good use the industry contacts they made while studying for the Foundation Degree in Costume Construction for Screen and Stage at Coleg Morgannwg.

As part of her studies, Kate was placed with prestigious companies on work experience, including four months as costume maker/assistant on the BBC's Young Dracula, and a live project with the Welsh National Youth Opera production Maisey Day. Since leaving college she has been working full time at the Welsh National Opera as a costume maker on shows such as La Traviata, Madame Butterfly and Die Meistersinger Von Nurnberg.

Samantha's work experience included working alongside the costume designer for Theatre Mappa Mundi's The Importance of being Earnest, and working professionally on tour for Theatre Na n'Og as a wardrobe assistant. "This was a major step for me to build my contacts and experience with professionals within the industry," she said. "I worked

alongside directors, designers and actors and even had a role on stage! The course gave me the skills and confidence to go directly into the industry."

Graduating in 2009, Samantha then chose the freelance route and has collected an impressive list of credits for her costume work, including the Sound of Music, Les Miserables, and Hairspray. She has worked for the Wales Millennium Centre and the Birmingham Royal Ballet and was the costume designer on the feature film Masterpiece, which shot to fame in May this year when it was awarded Best Actor at the British Independent Film Festival.

Samantha also makes and alters bridal dresses and is in the process of setting up her own business. She said: "I'm loving what I am doing and am already set up with work for the next couple of years!"



Samantha Jones

Kate Barton

Holly is one in 7000!

Bridgend College student, Holly Bluett, has beaten 7,000 rising theatre stars to win a scholarship to the prestigious Birds School of Performing Arts in London.

Holly, 18, is one of just 25 applicants to have won a scholarship to the School. That means that the £30,000 fees will be covered.

Alumni of the Birds School of Performing Arts are very much in evidence in the West End. The list of top shows that their students feature in makes for a very long list.

Sharon James, Head of Creative Arts at Bridgend College says "It's so hard to get into these schools but we've always had high hopes for Holly. From the start we could see that she was really talented."

Indeed, Holly has already been cutting her teeth on a big stage. During her studies on the BTEC National Diploma in Musical Theatre she was part of the Bridgend College dance group Truedynamix which finished runners up on last summer's hit Channel 5 talent show Don't Stop Believing. And she's playing Eponine in the

college's current production, Les Miserables.

She said: "I am thrilled to not only be accepted, but get the scholarship. I'd like to end up performing in the West End. It's all I've ever wanted to do."



Holly Bluett

Credits for films, TV and albums

Jeremy Murphy began his career at CTS Lansdowne studios in 2004 - the same year that he completed his studies for a National Diploma in Music Technology at Coleg Sir Gâr, Llanelli.

Jeremy was highly motivated and focused. He achieved the highest possible grades but he decided against continuing his studies at university. He wanted to 'learn by doing'.

He had experienced industry standard equipment at college, and quickly found employment as an assistant engineer training under chief engineer Chris Dibble. He worked on many film/TV scores and album work with high profile producers and artists before moving on to Angel Recording Studios, London in October 2006.

Since then has worked on many major film scores, such as Nine, Letters to Juliet and The Killer Inside Me. His television credits include Bleak House, Little Dorrit and Miss Marple. And his album credits range from jazz and big band albums such as Guy Barkers' The Amadeus Project and the Dixie Chicks through to rock and pop with artists like Jeff



Jeremy Murphy

Beck, Helena Blackman and Robbie Williams.

The studios' forthcoming work includes Cee Lo Green's album The Lady Killer, James Blunt, C4's The Promise, and Jane Eyre.

From GCSEs to director

Thanks to on the job training, James Pepper is now a company director.

Starting out with GCSEs, James held a number of roles at Vista Retail Support including Test and Repair Manager and Operations Manager before he was promoted to Operations Director, thanks to the NVQ4 Management Training that he undertook with Acorn training in 2009.

Vista Retail Support installs and maintains electronic point of sale (EPOS) equipment for retailers in the UK, Europe, and beyond. It provides round the clock support, 365 days a year. Its clients include leading retail brands such as Midlands Co-op, Lloyds pharmacy, Londis, Dunelm and Spar, as well as pubs, clubs and food outlets. It employs more than 160 across the UK, with over 50 based in its Cardiff headquarters.

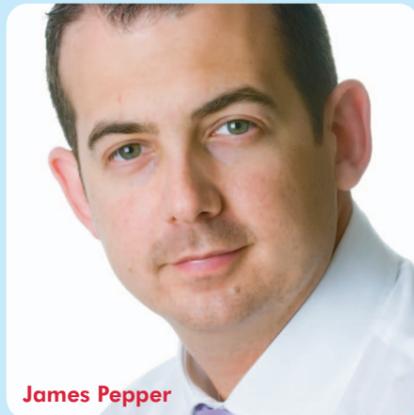
James said: "The NVQ taught me to be more analytical, logical and have a scientific approach to what I was doing and also to focus on what I was trying to achieve. It put me in the position where I could be considered for a senior management role".

The NVQ4 management takes around two years to complete and James was quite sceptical at first.

But he was soon won over. James said: "Even before I'd completed the course, one of my colleagues said that they'd noticed a big difference in me and the way I worked.

Initially there were only two of us from the company taking part in the NVQ4. Now we've got seven or eight senior managers that have either completed or are in the process of completing the qualification – largely because I was able to demonstrate just how useful these courses could be and how valuable they are to their careers and to Vista as a business."

The course also prepared him for further study. He has recently participated in a pilot project with UWIC and Acorn as part of his studies towards a Foundation Degree in Applied Professional Practice.



James Pepper



Phillipa Bates

Solid career in accountancy

Phillipa Bates was a mature learner with family commitments when she started on her accountancy learning journey with VGTA at Barry College in September 2007.

She has notched up a string of qualifications, mainly awarded by the AAT – the Association of Accounting Technicians, the qualification and membership body that awards around 90% of all vocational qualifications in accounting, and which is sponsored by the professional accounting bodies CIPFA, ICAEW, CIMA and ICAS.

Her most recent qualification was the AAT Technician NVQ level 4, which she gained last year. Her quick progress earned her the respect of members of staff and her employer. VGTA/Barry College awarded her the Accountancy Learner of the Year Award. And her employer put her skills to good use. She is currently responsible for payroll for around 100 members of staff – a vitally important role in any organisation. In addition, she was given extra responsibility in her role as a result of her qualification and is now in the running for promotion to accounts manager.

Safe pair of professional hands

Rhian Newton has been named NEBOSH 'Best Candidate of the Year 2011' after receiving the highest mark out of the thousands of students who took the NEBOSH Fire Safety and Risk Management exam from across the globe.

Rhian has a demanding role at Warwick International – a leading supplier of Occupational Health Management software across the UK. She also puts her skills and professional interests to good use as a member of IOSH - the chartered body for health and safety professionals as well as the Chartered Quality Institute.

Whilst completing her studies at Deeside College, Rhian broadened her work horizons and is now actively involved with the Warwick site COMAH (control of major accident hazards) plan, which involves operating at the highest level with site management and directors as well as the emergency services and enforcing authorities.



Rhian Newton

Learning to be a teacher on the job

Philip George is taking very much a hands-on approach in his aim to become a teacher.

Clearly enjoying the company of people and relishing opportunities to organise and work in a team, he has set up a wheelchair basketball team in his own time. A Paralympic Games sport, who knows where that might lead!

Career-wise, Philip achieved good GCSEs and started to develop a career in construction following success in gaining a National Diploma. But then, inspired by his mother who had had a great experience in the childcare sector, and given the vagaries of the construction industry, he took the bold move to change career.

Through Powys Training, he first gained work experience in a primary school which then turned into a paid position as a teaching assistant plus an apprenticeship in Children's

Care, Learning and Development. With the apprenticeship under his belt, he has now moved on to study for a Foundation Degree in Inclusive Studies for Teaching Assistants through the University of Wales Trinity St David in Carmarthenshire. His plan is then to top-up the Foundation Degree into a full degree and qualifying as a teacher. A mathematics specialist is his ultimate goal.



Philip George