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Press release

The Big Pitch

Nick Hewer of BBC 1's The Apprentice fame has taken a break from judging aspiring apprentices in London to judge the next generation of business talent cultivated in the South Wales Valleys.

Nick, who has been Lord Sugar's right hand man and PR consultant for more than 25 years was joined by three other judges on Thursday 25th November 2010, at Techniquest, Cardiff Bay, to cast their votes on eight teams of college students from four further education colleges in the Valleys. This was part of Merthyr Tydfil's Global Enterprise Week in conjunction with the Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme (HOVIP) and a project team including representatives from the colleges and the Welsh Assembly Government.

On talking about the evening Nick said: "I thought the concept of the evening was well constructed and the calibre of the students' presentations was excellent.

"The level of enthusiasm from all of the students that took part surpassed my expectations and I was delighted to be involved in such an energetic event."

Ex Nihilio, the winning team from The College Ystrad Mynach, who are all studying for a national diploma in business studies, said: "It is a fantastic that we have won such a highly competitive event.

"We have learnt a lot through the whole experience and we have been able to put into practice a lot of what we are learning on our course. It has been great working as a team and we all feel it has helped our interpersonal skills and develop our confidence as well as help prepare us for university."

The college teams each prepared and presented their ideas on how best to market a new visitor centre for Rhymney Brewery which will be relocating to Blaenavon, Torfean, near to the Big Pit, in March 2011. The idea was piloted one year ago and originated from the main sponsor, HOVIP, which is the current UK Enterprise Support Initiative of the Year in the Awards organised by the UK Sector Skills Council for Enterprise.

In preparation for the event the teams from Coleg Gwent, Coleg Morgannwg, Merthyr Tydfil College and The College Ystrad Mynach visited Rhymney Brewery and the visitor centre at Penderyn Distillery. The students also attended a number of workshops to develop the skills needed to complete the task.

The workshops covered marketing and presentation skills and how to write a press release and were delivered by local business people: Chris James director of CIOTEK Ltd., Helen Murdoch, managing director of Helen Murdoch Marketing Ltd. and Eryl Jones, managing director of Equinox Communications.

On the night the teams delivered a short presentation including a costed marketing plan and ideas for the visitor centre experience, and responded to questions from the judges. In preparation for the final, the teams also submitted press releases to support the pitch.

Ieuan Wyn Jones, Minister for the Economy and Transport, said the event highlighted the benefits for students working on live business projects.

"This is a great experience for students and provides them with a real flavour of the business world, while developing their entrepreneurial skills. This project is linked to the Welsh Assembly Government's new Big Ideas Wales campaign and the Youth Entrepreneurial Strategy to inspire and motivate young people to consider starting a business and increase their awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities.

"It's important that we enable our young people to have confidence in their ideas and offer support for entrepreneurs. By doing so, we can nurture those ideas and give people the confidence to take that all-important step towards starting their own business. "

Phil Burkhard, HOVIP programme manager, said: "Each team has worked incredibly hard and we have all been delighted by the high quality of what has been submitted. All the students can be congratulated on completing the journey which has additionally helped to further inspire Rhymney Brewery.

Feedback from the Judges on the winning team was excellent. They thought the students from The College Ystrad Mynach had a well costed marketing plan and took an imaginative approach to marketing the product. They were also impressed how the team considered targeting a broader marketplace outside Wales."

Steve Evans, chairman of Rhymney Brewery, said: “It was a fantastic evening and I am proud to have been involved in such an enterprising opportunity for young people.

“The standard of work and ideas far surpassed anything that I expected and the young people involved should be encouraged by their performance. I’m sure that we will be implementing a few of their ideas when our centre opens next year.”

The event took place at Techniquest in Cardiff Bay. The judges that accompanied Nick Hewer with his decision were Steve Evans, chairman of Rhymney Brewery, Chris Kelsey, editor of Business in Wales and Eryl Jones, managing director of Equinox Communications.

Notes to editors:

- Film footage of the Big Pitch final available on request. Please contact Nathan Webb, Anytime Films, on 01495 312670 or nathan@anytimefilms.com
- Sponsors of the event are:
 - Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme
 - Equinox Communications
 - Merthyr Tydfil Enterprise Group
 - Four Further Education Colleges are taking part in this event through entrepreneurship education funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, through the revised Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy 2010-15 (YES). For more information on YES and the BigIdeasWales campaign, please go to www.bigideaswales.com.
- The event is supported by the Welsh Assembly Government
- The Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme (HOVIP) is now in its third phase. In the last 2 years alone, HOVIP has helped 175 businesses achieve over £1 million, mainly in additional business, and is contributing to safeguarding 539 jobs (www.hovip.org.uk).

HOVIP is part funded by the Welsh Assembly Government (Heads of the Valleys) and is hosted by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council on behalf of five local authorities: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Torfaen.

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