

NEWS RELEASE

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Suffolk Big Skill's magnificent seven!

The seven winners in Suffolk's first ever Big Skill Awards were announced on Wednesday June 17 at an evening ceremony held at the Town Hall in Ipswich.

Run by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in partnership with BBC Radio Suffolk, The Big Skill Awards recognise and reward people who have improved their life or the lives of others through learning.

The Suffolk winner of the overall award for excellence, chosen from the winners of each award category, was Michael Coe – who also won the Employer Commitment to Skills Award.

Michael runs The Entertainer toy shop in Ipswich, part of a national chain, but judges said he had “gone the extra mile to inspire his staff to improve their own levels of learning”.

“His investment in his work force is remarkable and inspiring,” they added. “Not only does this benefit his business, it provides his staff with a great grounding in their career – experience and qualifications. He is a true example of excellence in changing the lives of others through learning.”

Judges also praised “impressive” 17-year-old Mercedes Sibley, who won the 17-19 Learner Award.

“She has come an extremely long way in a short time and has made an impressive start on her learning and career path,” they added.

After attending school infrequently, the Bury St Edmunds teenager enrolled on an Entry to Employment course in October last year, and has now achieved qualifications in numeracy, literacy and a City and Guilds employability award.

She is preparing for a foundation course in science in September, and hopes this will lead to a place on a forensic science course next year.

Laura Morgan, of Lowestoft, won the Adult Learner Award, and judges said she was 'an inspiration' to fellow students, adding: "Her contribution to the college is absolutely incredible and phenomenal. She is a role model to all and goes the extra mile, acting as an inspiring voice for fellow learners."

Laura, 43, combines a Working in Travel qualification at Lowestoft College with looking after two children and her mother, who has health problems.

Since her course began in September 2007, Laura has shrugged off the trauma of having her house flooded twice, and was this year voted in as Chancellor of the Lowestoft College Student Congress. She also attends college in her own time to mentor students, contributing to an improved course success rate.

The winners were announced on Wednesday at an awards ceremony that was open to the public to attend. Winners were presented with a certificate, trophy and a £150 experience day voucher by BBC Sport presenter Ray Stubbs, who returned to Ipswich to present the awards after launching The Big Skill in January this year.

The awards ceremony followed a day-long showcase event outside the Town Hall, where people could try their hand at different skills taught by colleges and training providers in Suffolk, including radio presenting skills, hairdressing and building a giant puzzle. Various demonstrations took place at training provider stalls throughout the day including IT, engineering and floristry.

There were also stage demonstrations and performances from learners across the county, from ballroom and Latin American dancing to DJ demonstrations and street theatre.

The Suffolk winners of the Apprenticeship Awards 2009, also run by the LSC, also received their awards at the ceremony. Harry Turner was named Apprentice of the Year, with John Michael Hair Design Group winning Employer of the Year.

BBC Suffolk presenter Mark Murphy said: "I found all the nominations for the Adult Learners Award particularly moving. Just hearing how people can juggle such busy

and demanding lives, and still manage to have the enthusiasm for learning. Laura really deserves this, but everyone showed amazing determination."

Judith Mobbs, Area Director at LSC Suffolk, said The Big Skill had done a great job of raising awareness of the learning and training opportunities on offer in Suffolk. "It's been wonderful to celebrate and recognise the real achievements of learners across the county," she added.

"The Big Skill winners should be an inspiration to others and show that it is possible to overcome challenges and learn new skills that can open doors and change lives for the better."

The full results are as follows:

14 - 16 Learner Award

- **WINNER:** Kelly Aldous, 16, from Felixstowe

17 – 19 Award

- **WINNER:** Mercedes Sibley, 17, from Bury St Edmunds
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Francesca Durrant, 19, from Lowestoft
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Curtis Hearn, 19, from Stowmarket

Adult Learner Award

- **WINNER:** Laura Morgan, 43, from Lowestoft
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Susan Turner, 45, from Ixworth
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Maria Williams, 33, from Ipswich

Skills for the Community Award

- **WINNER:** Jason Scrivener, 16, from Ipswich
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Trevor Durham, 57, from Ipswich

Skills for Work Award

- **WINNER:** Ashley Green, 20, from Ipswich
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Kirsti Goodwin, 19, from Bury St Edmunds

Employer Commitment to Skills Award

- **WINNER:** Michael Coe, Ipswich
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** PC World, Copdock, Ipswich

The Learners' Champion Award

- **WINNER:** Stephen Kings, 35, from Beccles
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Michael Hallam, 51, from Needham Market
- **HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Gaynor Marsh, 32, from Ipswich

The Big Skill Excellence Award

- **WINNER:** Michael Coe from Ipswich

**Apprenticeship Awards 2009
Suffolk Apprentice of the Year**

WINNER: Harry Turner, 16, from Saxmundham

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Hannah Green, 19, from Ipswich and Shane Allum, 18 from Ipswich

Employer of the Year

WINNER: John Michael Hair Design Group in Ipswich

HIGHLY COMMENDED: SLP Engineering in Lowestoft

Ends

**For further information please contact Dawn Humphreys at Tribe on 01603
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For comments from the BBC, please ring 0121 567 6274

Notes to editors

The Big Skill 2009

The Big Skill first ran in 2008 and following its success in Norfolk was rolled out across all six counties in the East of England, with support from Ray Stubbs.

About the Learning and Skills Council

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) aims to improve the skills of young people and adults to ensure that England has a workforce of world class standard by 2020.

The LSC:

- provides free training programmes to young people and adults employed in local businesses
- plans and funds education and training in schools, colleges and sixth forms
- provides advice and supports people wanting to continue in, or return to, education
- provides financial support to young people and adults to allow them to continue in education

About BBC East

BBC East is built around six local radio stations and online sites - Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Three Counties (Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire).