

CELEBRATING SOMERSET'S LEARNING CHAMPIONS

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The search began this week for Somerset's 'stars of learning' as details for the 2008 Champions of Learning Awards - Somerset's equivalent of the learning Oscars – were unveiled.

The event, now in its sixth year, is organised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as a way of recognising and celebrating achievement in all areas of learning – sometimes against extraordinary odds.

This year's winners included Michael Westlake, nominated by **Bridgwater College**, who took the title Apprentice of the Year and then went on to represent the UK in the World Skills Championship in Japan.

Ben Cornock-Stark, from **Yeovil**, was another winner, taking top prize in the category 'Learning Against the Odds.' Ben, an apprentice at AgustaWestland, was dubbed the 'comeback kid' after recovering from a near fatal illness which left him in a coma for two and a half weeks. Yet, following a 15-month battle to regain his mobility, he continued with his training.

Janet Binding, aged 65, from **Minehead**, collected the award in the category 'Golden Learner'. She started on a range of computer courses at Bridgwater College in 2004 and was described by her tutors as an inspiration to others.

Trish Taylor, LSC Area Director for Dorset and Somerset, said today: "The Champions of Learning event is all about celebrating remarkable people like Michael, Ben and Janet. Now we want to hear about those people who deserve recognition in our 2008 awards."

Employers, colleges, learning providers or individuals across Somerset can nominate people for the awards.

The deadline for nominations is 5pm on January 25. Those shortlisted will be invited to a celebration dinner to be held at the Holiday Inn, Taunton on March 27.

The judging panel will be chaired by Peter Renshaw, Chief Executive of Connexions Somerset. Today he said: "Every year we are amazed and in many cases humbled by the stories which come to us.

"The Champions of Learning Awards is not just a way to celebrate success but to showcase it to a wider audience. These people deserve to have their success shouted from the rooftops!"

This year's awards will include a new category, the "Business Award". It is for small and medium sized organisations to nominate staff who they have supported through training and learning and who have helped to contribute to the performance of the organisation.

Other categories are:

- **Learning Against the Odds** – for individuals who have overcome a major difficulty or hurdle to reach their goal
- **Golden Learner** – proving that age is no barrier to learning, this category is open to those over 65 years of age.
- **Juggling to Learn** – recognising an individual who has gained a qualification while caring for someone else.
- **Young Learner** – for individuals aged 14 – 19 who have made a major learning achievement in any field.
- **Achieving Skills for Life** – recognising an individual who, irrespective of age, has significantly improved their literacy, language or numeracy
- **Apprentice of the Year** – open to all apprentices in Somerset aged 16 -25
- **Working in Partnership to Benefit the Learner** – to recognise an individual or organisation that has helped to reduce barriers to learning by working with other organisations
- **Inspiring Others to Learn** – to recognise someone whose character or words of wisdom leave a lasting impression and motivate others to learn.

Entries can be made by contacting events manager Nina Hurst-Jones on 01278 726169, email nina.hurst-jones@prospects.so.uk or access the nomination pack via www.lsc.gov.uk/col . Alternatively write to Nina Hurst-Jones, Champions of Learning Awards 2008, Pearl House, Church Street, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 5AT.

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