

**34TH INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SKILL OLYMPICS, ST GALLEN, SWITZERLAND,
4-7 JULY 1997**

PUBLICITY, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND VIDEO

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Confidential

34TH INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SKILL OLYMPICS - ST GALLEN, 1997 PUBLICITY, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND VIDEO

1. Publicity

1.1 Team publicity

The publicity strategy for the UK team entry was drawn up in June 1996. The campaign started that summer with a press release flagging up dates of national finals of competitions which would provide nominations for the 1997 team. This proved to be most effective as both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* followed up the story, reporting on the SkillBUILD and UK Fine Jewellery final selection contests.

12 February 1997 - National Training Awards ceremony

The 24 team members were formally announced at the National Training Awards (NTA) ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre on 12 February 1997.

The presenters welcomed the team who were applauded during the ceremony. Afterwards the then Education and Employment Minister James Paice and NTA Patron Prue Leith joined the team in a photocall.

This year, for the first time, we wrote to the individual competitors' Members of Parliament and, thanks to the agreement of the NTA Office, the relevant MPs received invitations to the ceremony. While only a few actually attended, a good number of them wrote offering congratulations to their constituents.

There was broad coverage on the team and individual members in the regional media and the trade, education and training/personnel press. Although the NTA ceremony did not attract national media interest, it is nevertheless an excellent focal point for the team's announcement, given its large audience from industry, public service, TECs, and other education and training organisations.

April 1997 - Team briefing at CITB Bircham Newton

A press release was issued highlighting the team briefing at the Construction Industry Training Board's Training Centre at Bircham Newton, Norfolk, and announcing a photo opportunity. This year, for the first time, a national newspaper (*The Mirror*) sent a photographer to take a team photo. *The Mirror*'s Education Correspondent followed this up with an interview and a double-page feature on the team appeared on 17 April. A number of local papers and education and trade press also requested photos.

May

UK SKILLS published a team list, including pictures and mini-biographies of individual competitors. Wide circulation of this attracted many further enquiries from the press.

29 June 1997 - team send-off at the Sheraton Park Tower Hotel

The final spotlight on the team before the competition was the evening reception on Sunday 29 June, generously hosted by the Sheraton Park Tower Hotel, where the Restaurant Service competitor, Giles Selves, works as Banqueting Captain. Guests included competitors' employers, competition organisers, college representatives, Board and committee members, team sponsors and other key figures in education and training. The reception served as a most suitable forum to thank employers and other supporters of the team.

UK SKILLS issued press invitations to industrial, education and training/personnel correspondents as well as to London broadcast media and the trade press. Obviously a Sunday evening is not an ideal time for media attendance but in fact the response was little different from 1995, when the send-off reception was early on a Monday morning - reputedly a 'good' time. Although there was a promising number of media enquiries immediately before the event, including Sky TV, Channel One (cable television) was the only broadcast media who attended. The team's departure always prompts subsequent enquiries on the results.

Regrettably a government minister could not attend the reception but the Department for Education and Employment issued a press notice announcing the support of Dr Kim Howells, Minister for Lifelong Learning, and his impending visit to St Gallen.

4-7 July - St Gallen

Two trade journals, *Caterer and Hotelkeeper* and *Electrical Contractor*, sent representatives to St Gallen. Channel One TV sent a crew, as did South Street Productions, a video production company commissioned by UK SKILLS (see *Video and TV* below). UK SKILLS had commissioned freelance photographer Jacky Chapman (who had covered the Birmingham, Amsterdam and Lyon events) to take individual photographs of UK competitors in action during the event.

10-14 July - results

Following the announcement of the results on 10 July, UK SKILLS circulated press releases to national media and all relevant local and trade press, as well as to education/training and personnel publications. Key news editors and specialist correspondents in all media were contacted immediately by telephone or fax, including the Press Association (PA).

The DfEE also issued a press release, distributed nationally, in which Dr Kim Howells congratulated the team and UK SKILLS.

The Times published a 10"x7" colour photograph of gold medallist Lee Blower on 12 July (syndicated via the PA). The *Financial Times* ran a story on Lee Blower with colour picture on 19 July, as did the *Daily Mail* on 24 July. *The Times* included a feature on IT silver medallist Mark Scott in its *Interface(IT)* section on 30 July.

1.2 Employers and sponsors

It was evident that this year employers and sponsors put a great deal more effort into publicising their own competitors. This was particularly noticeable with those employers which had their own PR agencies, such as The Sheraton Park Tower Hotel, and competition sponsors such as Hanson Bricks, DeWalt Power Tools, Crown Trade paints and Key Training (IT). Key Training's agency successfully placed stories on Mark Scott in *The Mail on Sunday* and *The Times* (*Interface*) end June/early July.

1.3 Press targets

All news releases were targeted at the following media:

- education, industrial and other specialist correspondents of national newspapers
- regional daily papers
- national and regional TV and radio
- regional weekly papers
- Press Association (and other news agencies)
- education and training/personnel press
- trade and technical publications
- UK SKILLS network of contacts, including skills competition organisers, freelance writers, education and training bodies, trade and employer associations, trade unions, government, TEC publications and PR agencies representing sponsors.

1.4 Specialist journals

Particularly worthy of note are

- *Caterer & Hotelkeeper* ran two three-page features on the Cookery and Restaurant Service competitors (in June and August)
- *Electrical Contractor* ran whole page features; *Electronics Times*, *Electronics Weekly* and *Computer Weekly* also gave good coverage.
- *Employment News* devoted the whole of the back page of the July/August issue to the Skill Olympics
- *Newscheck* (published by COIC - Careers and Occupational Information Centre) featured UK team members on the front cover of its July issue.
- *Newscheck* and *Training Tomorrow* have both commissioned articles from UK SKILLS for future issues.

(Note: as many specialist journals are published monthly, the full extent of coverage is not yet complete.)

1.5 Overall press coverage

Press cuttings collected since the National Training Awards ceremony in February 1997 up to end August 1997 give the following breakdown (December 1994 - February 1996 figures in

italics):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| national newspapers | - | 8 items in 5 publications (4 in 2) |
| regional newspapers | - | 90 items in 59 publications (142 in 89) |
| education/training/ personnel journals | - | 14 items in 13 publications (46 in 21) |
| trade/technical/house journals | - | 63 items in 46 publications (111 in 54) |

Total 1997 - **175 items in 123 publications**
(Feb -Aug)

(1995 (Dec 94 - Feb 96) : 307 in 168; 1993: 244 in 144.
1991: 125 in 95)

2. Video, TV and radio

Thanks to DfEE support, UK SKILLS commissioned **South Street Productions**, an independent production company, to make a video focusing on the UK entry for St Gallen. The producer, Richard Patching (who made videos on the Amsterdam and Taipei competitions) proposed a fresh treatment in the form of a 'fly on the wall' documentary. He provided four competitors (volunteers) with small camcorders with which they recorded their impressions and observations during their time in St Gallen. The production team also filmed competitors at work during the competition and recorded interviews with Dr Kim Howells and UK officials and visitors. The video is due for completion in October.

Richard Patching had approached all ITV regional companies, offering bespoke packages. As a result, **Yorkshire Television** commissioned a half-hour 'special' featuring the participants from the Yorkshire area. This is due for transmission in October. Richard Patching also provided footage for **Sky News** in July for a report on the St Gallen competition and results.

In February, **Meridian Broadcasting** filmed Giles Selves (Restaurant Service) at the Sheraton Park Tower Hotel following his success in the Hospitality Skills national finals.

In April, **Carlton Television** approached UK SKILLS about a proposal for *Your Shout* - a community affairs slot in which people with a passion on a particular subject can present their case. UK SKILLS provided background on the team members within the Carlton area and, after interviewing by telephone, Carlton invited Giles Selves to take part. Giles was filmed in the work setting of the Sheraton Park Tower where he expressed his great enthusiasm for his job and for representing the UK in the Skill Olympics. The programme went out immediately before the lunchtime and early evening regional news on two days in May.

Central Television made a short news item on bricklayer Lee Blower for its regional news in May. This included Lee training at Shrewsbury College and an interview with his college lecturer. To demonstrate his expertise, Lee built the Central logo in brick for the occasion! Central repeated some of this footage in July for a news report on Lee's success at St Gallen.

In August **Central Television** invited Lee Blower and Jonathan Freeman of UK SKILLS to be interviewed about the Skill Olympics for its *Jobfinder* community service slot for transmission in early September.

As mentioned above, **Channel One** (London cable TV) filmed at the team send-off reception and at St Gallen. This was for a 'St Gallen special' for the food series *Eat up!* and focused on Paul Ribbands and Giles Selves, the Cookery and Restaurant service competitors.

Many local BBC and commercial radio stations broadcast news items or interviews with team members between national finals and the international competition. As, however, one never normally knows the transmission times, many such items are missed and it is very difficult to monitor the full extent of this coverage, which certainly helps publicity at a local level.

3. **Public relations**

3.1 **Team patron**

Although Olympic athlete Fatima Whitbread had agreed in 1996 to be 1997 team patron, regrettably other commitments arising prevented her from attending the team briefing and send-off reception. Her patronage therefore only extended to providing a letter of support which every competitor received at Bircham Newton. This was of course most disappointing as her previous involvement had been considered to be a great success.

3.2 **Events**

At the team briefing at Bircham Newton, UK SKILLS held a dinner not only for competitors, team leaders and experts but also to which skills competition organisers, Board and committee members, UK SKILLS associates and CITB staff were invited. Principal guest was James Paice MP, who was thanked for his staunch support for skills competitions (this was in fact his last ministerial engagement).

The team send-off at The Sheraton Park Tower has been covered above under team publicity.

In St Gallen, the city council generously hosted a reception for UK SKILLS at the Rathaus, to which we welcomed Education and Employment Minister Dr Kim Howells, Drs Cees Beuk, President of IVTO, and other guests, including IVTO delegates, UK technical experts, as well as a number of Swiss officials and visitors from the UK.

4. **Operations**

This year was probably the most limited in terms of resources, the operation being largely handled internally by one member of staff, with most valuable assistance from press consultant Norman Brand (14 days between February and July). The press releases issued by DfEE in July were most helpful - not only in putting out messages of ministerial endorsement but also in disseminating news through government networks.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Press coverage

The analysis of the press cuttings shows continuing improvement in coverage since UK SKILLS' first involvement in 1991, when not a single national newspaper reported on the Amsterdam event. It is worth noting that this year the period between the National Training Awards ceremony and the international competition was five months, compared with 10 months in 1995. The trade and regional coverage has therefore been more compressed. On a pro rata monthly basis, the level of coverage has increased but the full picture will not emerge until say, October, by which time a number of trade and training journals will have published articles. Certainly compared with the previous three Skill Olympics, there was a distinct increase in the number of follow-up enquiries to press releases and requests for photographs. There is also no doubt that the quality of the photography ensured greater pictorial coverage than before, both in the national and trade press.

5.2 TV coverage

Gaining firm interest from TV companies is becomingly increasingly difficult - budget constraints are obviously universal. Although we approached the BBC in October 1996 and followed up over a period of months, we did not get a written reply until June when we were told there was no longer a suitable slot within the continuing education and training provision.

Following high-level contact with News International, Sky News intimated it was interested in covering the UK entry and the Skill Olympics at various stages. However, ultimately it was only prepared to broadcast a report if video footage was provided (which we did).

For the future, we will need to consider video news releases, that is, supplying broadcast-quality footage to TV channels at various stages for use at minimal cost to TV companies - but, of course, this would be subject to increased resources.

5.3 General

Until the Skill Olympics achieves a higher *worldwide* profile, it will be difficult to break through to the levels of prime-time national news coverage, as achieved by the sports Olympics. While the UK entry receives a creditable amount of media coverage overall, because this is spread out over several months, it lacks the impact of a sudden burst of publicity. On the other hand, the steady flow of reports over a longer period keeps the interest level 'simmering' for a very long time. Whereas in previous years we spent much time approaching news editors and correspondents in order to engage interest, It has got to the stage where newspapers and broadcast media are now coming to UK SKILLS, having noted key dates from earlier press releases - a most promising trend.

JF

September 1997