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INTERNATIONAL APPRENTICES VOCATIONAL TRAINING COMPETITION

"THE SKILL OLYMPICS"

EARLY HISTORY OF ITS FOUNDATION AND BRITISH ENTRY.

by

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The competition originated as a National Competition in Spain in 1947 and was then known as "The Vocational Training Competition". It was held on a national basis which involved a process of selection through preliminary trials at provincial, regional and national level in Spain. The competition enjoyed such a high degree of success that the organisers were encouraged to extend it on an international basis. Something like 20,000 Spanish apprentices enter to ascertain the national champions and they in turn represent their country in the annual International Competition.

In 1950, the National Headquarters of the Spanish Youth Organisation and the Portugese Juvenile Organisation, "Mocidade Portuguesa", organised the first International Vocational Training Competition in which young workmen from industrial firms and pupils of Vocational Training Schools in the metal, wood, electricity, graphic arts, building trades etc. took part.

A third International Competition was organised in 1953 and invitations were sent to France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Morocco, Portugal and Switzerland. All countries accepted officially, with the exception of Great Britain and Italy.

At that time, Frederick Hill, founder of the Canterbury Cathedral Craft Centre, heard indirectly of the competition. Since he had apprentices of a fairly high standard in woodwork, he felt they would be eligible. Within ten days of the commencement date, Mr. Hill received details of entry and found that the only apprentice he had within the correct age group was his own son, also that a guardian had to accompany a boy under eighteen years of age.

Such was his great interest and enthusiasm that at very short notice, he journeyed to Madrid accompanying his son, Douglas Hill. To quote Mr. Hill, "I arrived in Madrid fully expecting to join the British Team, only to find that my son and I were the British Team!"

His son, in fact, was the first and only British entry and no support was forthcoming from Great Britain. For his efforts in the competition Douglas Hill received a silver medal which was presented to him by General Franco at his residence, El Pardo, near Madrid. Mr. Hill was also presented to General Franco.

While in Madrid, Mr. Hill paid a personal visit to the British Embassy for support, without success. Most European countries were competing at Government level but Great Britain showed no interest whatsoever.

When Mr. Hill returned from the Third International Competition, he immediately took steps to promote interest in the competition. First, he contacted the press and articles appeared in several newspapers but this publicity achieved nothing. He next selected names of between three and four hundred firms from a Trade Directory and with secretarial help and assistance from his family, he prepared and sent out a circular, which contained a print of General Franco presenting the awards, to those firms. He also made personal visits to various firms and devoted much time and expense in the effort to gain some recognition for the competition, to the detriment of his business.

He contacted the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education (B.A.C.I.E.), British Industries Fair, London County Council and the Ministry of Education, but met only with frustrating disappointment. His attempts continued during 1954 and 1955, the Spanish Authorities giving all the support they could and invited him to attend as Observer and British Representative at the Annual Organising Committee Meeting in Madrid.

Undaunted, Hill maintained that if competition in sport was so universally popular, then such could be with competition in crafts and industrial skills.

A contact was made with Mr. A.R. Emerson of the London County Council Central School of Arts, which brought results. Mr. Hill motored Mr. Emerson across France and Spain to see a competition in Madrid. Mr. Emerson impressed by Hill's sincerity and enthusiasm, made a report to the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, who had already shown an encouraging interest.

Meanwhile, Hill's attempts to interest British firms were having some effect and in 1956, he was able to make up a team of six British apprentices, making his own selection from entrance forms he was receiving from various parts of the country. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths helped with the organising of the team. The Metal Box Company also gave assistance and the City and Guilds of London Institute were showing an interest.

This British Team for 1956 was composed of apprentices from the Metal Box Company, Ed. Curran Engineering Company Limited and Birmid Industries and they gained one First, one Second, one Third and two Fourth prizes at Madrid. The Press, The British Broadcasting Corporation and Television were now taking an interest. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths sent four Observers to the competition and one apprentice as a Demonstrator of silversmithing - since no competition was being held in that particular trade. The silver cup made was presented to Dr. Almagro, the Organiser of the Competition.

Mr. Hill had hitherto personally borne the brunt of the expenses in organising a British Team, but after the 1956 competition, a meeting was held at the Goldsmiths Hall, London, when numerous firms attended. City and Guilds of London offered secretarial and office facilities and agreed to reimburse Mr. Hill for some of the expense incurred in 1957. A British Organising Committee was also formed at that meeting.

In 1957, a British Team of twelve apprentices left London for Madrid with Mr. Swift of the Metal Box Company, acting as a Technical Representative. The British Team were awarded one First, three Second and three Third prizes. Encouraging support came from Sir Ivor Mallett, British Ambassador in Madrid, when he visited the 1957 Competition in Madrid and met all the British competitors.

The Spanish organisers were now trying earnestly to interest other countries in holding the competition outside Spain and in 1958, Belgium agreed to become the first country to hold the competition outside the originating country. It was also the year of the great International Exhibition in Brussels and the Belgian Government consented to find funds for the competition to be held at the Institut des Arts et Metiers.

Great Britain sent twenty apprentices in 1958 to compete at Brussels. Mr. Hill, while acting before as British Representative and Secretary, became the British Official Representative with Mr. Emerson as Technical Representative and Mr. Allen of the Metal Box Company as Technical Assistant. Britain gained four Firsts, two Seconds and five Thirds in the awards.

A surprise event that year was the award of the Medal of Youth to Hill by the Spanish Authorities for his special efforts and services for the benefit of European youth. This medal is considered in Spain to be the highest award for services to youth and was received by Hill in/



in the presence of the Spanish Ambassador to Belgium and Senor J. Cancio, the Minister of Youth for Spain. Mr. Hill earned also the distinction of being the first "foreigner" to receive this medal.

In 1959, Italy offered hospitality and the competition was held in Modena, North Italy. A great deal of work was undertaken by the City and Guilds of London Institute in selecting the British Team for this competition and a team of twenty-three boys took part, Britain's highest entry to that date.

A team of thirty-one boys went from Britain to Barcelona in 1960. The only team to exceed that number was Spain with thirty-seven apprentices. Mr. R.D. Graham, Assistant Director of the City and Guilds of London Institute, took a great interest in the 1960 competition. Credit must be given to Mr. Graham, as much of the success and selection of the British Team was due to his organising ability and special efforts. He also visited Spain while the competition was in progress. Great Britain gained three Firsts, four Second and sixteen Third prizes. Again, General Franco presented the awards at El Pardo, Madrid.

The competition was held in Duisberg, West Germany, in 1961, when thirty-two apprentices went from Great Britain to compete. This was the last year in which France participated. Austria entered for the first time in 1961 but Morocco had not entered since 1954.

There was a drop in the total number of apprentices competing from 194 to 156 in the 1962 competition held at Gijon, Spain. Italy and Luxembourg did not compete and generally the numbers were lower. This may be attributed to the very short notice of the venue of the competition. Great Britain entered twenty-eight apprentices. For the first time, Holland entered the competition with eight apprentices and the first non-European country sent a team of eight; this was from Japan. Great Britain won three Gold medals, eight Silver medals and seven Bronze medals. The three Gold medals were won in brickwork, cabinet making and silversmithing. No awards were made by Great Britain in turning, fitting or machine drawing but a Silver medal was won in milling. Japan, in their first competition, out of eight competitors, won six Gold medals and one Silver medal. Sir John Hare (Lord Blakenham), then Minister of Labour, gave an official welcome to the British Team at the offices of the Ministry of Labour, on their return from Gijon.

The 12th International Apprentice Competition, held in Dublin in July, 1963, was the largest ever held since 1950, when it first became an International Competition. The number of competitors had increased from 24 to 225. In 1950, two countries competed, viz., Spain and Portugal and thirteen countries competed in 1963.

Observers attending the 1963 competition in Dublin included representatives from United States of America, Mexico and Sweden. Czechoslovakia, Russia and Brazil were also showing interest. The competition involved an expenditure of almost £100,000 of which Irish Industry contributed £25,000 from some 200 organisations and firms. The Department of Education and City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee gave large grants to make up the balance, including some £60,000 spent equipping The College of Technology, Bolton Street, Dublin for the event. Prizes were presented by President De Valera in St. Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle.

In October, 1963, Mr. Frederick D. Hill was awarded The Order of Cisneros by Spain for his work for Youth and this decoration was presented by Spain's Chief of State. Later, in the New Year Honours List, he was awarded the M.B.E. by Her Majesty the Queen.

In August, 1964, Portugal was host country for the 13th International Competition which took place in Lisbon. Austria did not compete. Great Britain was represented in 28 of the 29 categories, winning awards in 15. They won eight Gold, five Silver and two Bronze medals and this was the finest performance that any British Team has ever achieved in the competition. Gold medals were awarded for House Wiring 'B', Painting and Decorating, Silversmithing, Turning 'B', Carpentry 'S', Radio/

Radio and T.V. and Brickwork. Silver medals were awarded for Stone Cutting, Plumbing, Foundry Moulding, Milling, Electric Welding and Bronze medals were gained in Jewellery and Constructional Steelwork.

Mr. J.B. Brown, Education and Training Officer, Skefko Ball Bearing Company Limited, Luton, was the British Technical Assistant in engineering trades and Mr. J. Watts of The Metal Box Company Limited was the British Team Leader.

Sir Archibald Ross, The British Ambassador in Lisbon, visited the Competition and spoke to each member of the British Team. His interest provided the boys with that extra stimulus to work with added zest. Colonel Work and Mr. E. Lord were also there representing the Ministry of Labour.

An incident worthy of note is that one of the British apprentices sustained an injury to a finger on his left hand prior to the competition. Medical opinion was that it was out of the question to attempt to compete in a competition of such a high standard, with a handicap. After further consultation it was decided to amputate the top of his finger. The operation was successful, the apprentice went to Lisbon and won a Gold medal in the Junior Turning Section. It was only after the competition was over that the secret was revealed.

Frederick Hill's ambition all along has been to interest various British Authorities in the possibility of holding the International Competition in Great Britain. His ambition is about to be realised as the 14th International Competition is to be held in Glasgow, Scotland, in July 1965.

When Mr. Kenneth Lewis, M.P. for Rutland and Stamford, asked the Minister of Labour in Parliament what plans he had for assisting, financially and otherwise, the International Apprentice Competition when Great Britain was the host in 1965, Mr. Godber replied that he proposed to make available a grant up to about £42,000 towards the cost.

m H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh consented to be Patron of the 14th International Apprentice Competition held in Glasgow in 1965.

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#### EARLY REGULATIONS

As a result of the interest aroused, coupled with the obviously good effects on apprentices' training, the need was felt to draft Rules and lay down Regulations for future competitions.

In June 1954, in view of the wide scope acquired by the competition, an Organising Committee was set up. The Committee included an Official and Technical Representative from each participating country.

After careful study and in the light of experience gained in the 1954 competition, provisional Regulations were issued and tried out in the 1956 competition.

On the 1st October, 1956, at a full Meeting of the Organising Committee, the Regulations for subsequent competitions were finally approved.

The Organising Committee, which was originally conceived by Mr. Hill and Mr. Emerson, was disbanded after the 1960 competition and has been re-organised on a more representative basis. The competition is governed by the Organising Committee of the International Apprentice Vocational Training Competition with its offices then in Marques de Riscal 16, Madrid, Spain. This committee included:-



This committee included:-

President: Mr. D. Eugenio Lopez y Lopez, National Head of the Youth Organisation.

Vice-President: Mr. D. Faustino Ramos Diez, Head of the Central Labour Office of the Youth Organisation.

Secretary: Mr. Francisco Albert Vidal, Head of the Vocational Training Department of the Central Labour Office.

Each country then had only one vote on international matters, thus Spain who originally conceived the idea, then ranked in decisions equal only to the other countries.

Each country entering apprentices had its own Organising Committee, the British Organising Committee included representatives nominated by appropriate Government Departments, the Industrial Training Council, The British Council, Nationalised Industries, the three Associations connected with Technical Institutions, the building, engineering and electrical industries, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education and the City and Guilds of London Institute.

The British Organising Committee then included:-

Chairman: Mr. D.E. Woodbine Parish, C.B.E., F.I.O.B., F.B.I.M.

Vice-Chairman: Mr. N.B. Beard, O.B.E.

Secretary: Mr. P.D. Crofts, M.A.

Consultant: Mr. S. Medsforth, O.B.E., Hon. M.A., B.Sc.(Tech)., LL.B.

Official Representative: Mr. F.D. Hill, M.B.E., F.R.G.S. M. Inst. P.I.

Technical Representative: Mr. A.R. Emerson, M.B.E., F.Coll.H., N.T.D.

No country could enter more than one competitor in each age category for each trade. There was a constant demand for the addition of fresh subjects which showed that interest was alive and growing. The trades listed below were among those included in the competition:-

|                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fitting (A and B)          | Brickwork (A and B)             |
| Jewellery (S)              | Turning (A and B)               |
| Plumbing (A and B)         | Engineering Drawing (A and B)   |
| Milling (S)                | Housewiring (A and B)           |
| Electric Welding (A and B) | Industrial Wiring (S)           |
| Gas Welding (S)            | Foundry Moulding, Cast Iron (S) |
| Wood Patternmaking (S)     | Industrial Forge Work (S)       |
| Cabinet Making (A and B)   | Painting and Decorating (S)     |
| Sheet Metal Work (S)       | Joinery (A and B)               |
| Stone Cutting (S)          | Panel Beating (S)               |
| Carpentry (A and B)        | Silversmithing (S)              |

A = Senior Category B = Junior Category S = Single Category.

The age requirements for entry to the competition were as follows:-

Category A: 22, 21 and 20 years of age in the year of the competition.

Category B: 19, 18, 17 and 16 years of age in the year of the competition.

Category S: 22, 21, 20, 19, 18, 17 and 16 years of age in the year of the competition.

Entry was not restricted to apprentices only and candidates, who were within the stipulated age groups and had completed an apprenticeship were considered. After the 1965 competition in Glasgow, the age limit was 21 years of age.

#### SELECTING THE BRITISH TEAM.

Later the City and Guilds of London Institute chose the British Team by means of Selection Tests held at convenient regional centres in Britain, where the number of candidates justified this and every effort was made to avoid undue travelling for candidates and incurring unnecessary expense to firms.

Although no country could enter more than one competitor in each age category for each trade in the final competition, two candidates could be entered for the Selection Tests in each category from each firm.

A fee of 5 gns. per candidate entered was charged to cover the cost of the Selection Tests and general administration. Participating firms were responsible for the travelling expenses of their candidates in respect of both the Selection Tests and the International Competition.

City and Guilds of London Institute were very ably assisted in this mammoth task of testing by a group of enthusiasts, keenly interested in the advance of good education and training.

Those earlier British Teams were chosen by means of test pieces undertaken within the apprentice's own place of employment. Eliminating tests were introduced and the results were most revealing and rewarding. Such tests were therefore undertaken before the final selection was made for the British Team.

In any trade, the candidate had to be of the required standard, otherwise that trade was not represented.

The Selection Tests entailed a tremendous amount of work and Mr. J.B. Brown, Education and Training Officer, Skefko Ball Bearing Company Limited, Luton, played a very large part, especially in the Fitting, Turning, Milling and Engineering Drawing Sections...

The following Colleges and firms are among those who have in the past generously afforded staff and facilities to carry out tests for the selection of the British Team:-

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Fitting                 | Skefko Ball Bearing Company Limited,<br>Luton.                                      |
| Turning                 |   |
| Milling                 |   |
| Engineering Drawing     |   |
| Brickwork               | Twickenham, Leicester and Willesden<br>Technical Colleges.                          |
| Carpentry               | Brixton, Leicester, Newcastle and<br>Twickenham Technical Colleges.                 |
| Foundry Moulding        | Newton, Chambers and Company, Sheffield.  |
| House Wiring            | London Electricity Board.   |
| Industrial Wiring       | Poplar Garretts College, Birmingham.  |
| Joinery                 | St. Helens Technical College, Lancs., and<br>The Michelin Tyre Company, Stoke.      |
| Patternmaking           | Brixton, Brooklyn and Liverpool Technical<br>Colleges. Reid Kerr Technical College, |
| Painting and Decorating | Renfrew and Municipal College, Belfast.   |
| Panel Beating           | Letchworth College of Technology.   |
| Plumbing                | Brixton Technical College.  |
| Radio and Television    | The Pressed Steel Company Limited, Oxford.  |
| Sheet Metal             | Brixton, Brooklyn and Newcastle Technical<br>Colleges.                              |
| Stone Cutting           | Mid. Herts College.   |
|                         | The British Aircraft Corporation,<br>Stevenage.                                     |
|                         | Bath Technical College.   |



Participating countries were invited, before each competition, to submit drawings to the International Committee and the competition tests were selected from those. Each country was allocated certain subjects in which it was asked to provide a Technical Assistant. The Technical Assistants became members of a Sub-Committee whose function it was to select drawings for the tests and after the tests had been completed, to take part in the judging. Each Sub-Committee presided over by a Technical Representative.

The tests range up to forty hours' duration and they are not made known to the competitors until the actual competition commences. The competition lasts generally for two weeks, the first of which is devoted to the tests and the second to judging and visits. The host country provides accommodation for the competition and the teams. It also arranges a comprehensive programme of social, cultural and industrial visits. Interpreters and officials were constantly in attendance to help any competitor who encounters any difficulty.

The initiative, sheer hard work and determination of Frederick Hill, in the face of initial total lack of interest from the British Government and British Industry, has given apprentices of the United Kingdom an opportunity to enter an annual International Trade Competition - (The Skill Olympics) - where they can compare their own standard of performance with those from other countries and are afforded the added opportunity of observing new and perhaps better methods. Hill later conceived the title "Skill Olympics", a new name which soon became popular with other participating nations.

The way was, therefore, prepared for a big step forward in the history of the British Apprenticeship and it is hoped that industry will help to ensure that this step is firm, resolute and worthy of the innate skill of British craftsmanship.

OVERALL COMPETITION RESULTS FOR 1961.

| COUNTRY       | NUMBER OF<br>COMPETITORS | AWARDS |        |        |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
|               |                          | GOLD   | SILVER | BRONZE |
| Belgium       | 19                       | 1      | 1      | 1      |
| Denmark       | 1                        | -      | -      | -      |
| Eire          | 21                       | 2      | 2      | 5      |
| Germany       | 20                       | 2      | 2      | 7      |
| Great Britain | 28                       | 8      | 5      | 2      |
| Holland       | 14                       | 3      | 3      | -      |
| Italy         | 10                       | -      | 1      | 3      |
| Japan         | 17                       | 12     | 4      | -      |
| Luxembourg    | 6                        | 1      | 2      | -      |
| Portugal      | 27                       | 5      | 5      | 6      |
| Spain         | 26                       | 4      | 6      | 9      |
| Switzerland   | 9                        | 3      | 2      | 2      |

Each apprentice competing in the Competition received a Certificate.

TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPETITORS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

| NATIONS       | 1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 | 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | TOTAL |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| AUSTRIA       | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 8    | 8    | -    | -    | 24    |
| BELGIUM       | -    | -    | -    | -    | 2    | 11   | 25   | 25   | 19   | 20   | 19   | 19   | 14   | 19   | 19   | 172   |
| DENMARK       | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 11   | 1    | 12    |
| ETRE          | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 4    | 17   | 14   | 18   | 13   | 13   | 16   | 32   | 21   | 140   |
| FRANCE        | -    | -    | -    | 1    | 3    | 10   | 16   | 10   | 10   | -    | -    | 5    | -    | -    | -    | 35    |
| GERMANY       | -    | -    | -    | 18   | 19   | 5    | 13   | 13   | 15   | 25   | 32   | 32   | 24   | 23   | 20   | 207   |
| GREAT BRITAIN | -    | -    | -    | 1    | -    | 6    | 12   | 20   | 23   | 31   | 32   | 32   | 28   | 31   | 28   | 212   |
| HOLLAND       | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 8    | 13   | 14   | 35    |
| ITALY         | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 15   | 19   | 15   | 31   | 25   | 19   | 19   | -    | 13   | 10   | 147   |
| JAPAN         | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 8    | 14   | 17   | 39    |
| LUXEMBOURG    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 4    | 4    | 8    | 8    | -    | 9    | 6    | 31    |
| MOROCCO       | -    | -    | -    | 9    | 15   | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 24    |
| PORTUGAL      | 12   | 8    | 8    | 10   | 9    | 14   | 8    | 12   | 12   | 17   | 12   | 12   | 16   | 20   | 27   | 173   |
| SPAIN         | 12   | 8    | 24   | 26   | 28   | 35   | 30   | 28   | 28   | 37   | 30   | 25   | 25   | 27   | 26   | 336   |
| SWITZERLAND   | -    | -    | -    | 4    | 8    | 3    | -    | 2    | 3    | -    | 11   | 11   | 5    | 10   | 9    | 55    |

To these figures need to be added 1965. Held in Britain when more firsts were won than any other competing country, & 1966 held in Utrecht, Holland, and 1967 in Madrid, Spain.

TOTAL: 1,642