

COLLEGE SET TO PLAY KEY ROLE IN SKILLS STRATEGY



A tickertape welcome for Matthew Pinsent as he arrives on a Harley-Davidson, flanked by outriders.

Olympic hero roars in for launch of £9m campus

Multi gold medallist Matthew Pinsent swapped his rowing boat for a motorbike when he launched a £9 million campus at North East Worcestershire College.

The Olympic hero also unveiled a motorcycle industry training academy, extensively equipped by Harley-Davidson.

The new facility is the US motorcycle giant's only training centre in the UK, offering a massive boost to skills development and the economy of the West Midlands.

It will also provide motorcycle engineering courses for local businesses, apprentices and students, plus training in management development, leadership and customer services.

This is in addition to the extra facilities now

on offer at the new campus, which include CAD engineering workshops, an arts centre and a business school.

Principal Neil Bromley said: "NEW College now has a significant role both within the local community and the skills strategy for the West Midlands.



"Here in Bromsgrove and in Redditch we have built a college which is the envy of the sector."

The motorcycle academy was built with the support of a £1.7 million grant from Advantage West Midlands.

Chief executive John Edwards said the new facilities were world-class, adding: "It is an enormous compliment that Harley-Davidson has chosen the West Midlands, and the fantastic NEW College, as the location for their European training base."

Master class is crowning glory for hair and beauty tutors

Celebrity stylist Andrew Barton gave an exclusive master class for 20 hair and beauty tutors at Solihull College.

Andrew, famed for his role in Channel 4's Ten Years Younger, delivered practical demonstrations in the college salons.

Working with volunteer models, the twice-nominated British Hairdresser of the Year spoke about current industry trends, consultation techniques and new product lines.

Head of school Yvonne Malpass said: "We all picked up some really useful techniques that only someone at Andrew's level in the industry could so expertly demonstrate. It was a great professional development opportunity for our hair and beauty tutors."

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COLLEGE KICKS OFF TOP AWARD



Sports students Hannah Denslow, 17, and Adam Tipper, 19, with the award.

Sutton Coldfield College has kicked off a prestigious award from the Football Association (FA). It has been awarded National FA Charter Standard status in recognition of the quality of its football coaching and facilities.

Sutton is the only college in the West Midlands to receive the accolade, and one of just four in the whole country to be honoured for both men's and women's football.

Sports academy manager Jason Allen said: "This has great implications for the students coming through next year. They can arrive with the comfort and knowledge of knowing that the college is a beacon for football achievement, demanding the highest standards."

Villa stars Steven Davis, Craig Gardner and Gabriel Agbonlahor have all used the college's facilities as part-time students, while Shaun Boothe (Tamworth) and Nathan Smith (Stafford Rangers) are both former students.

Head of women's football Katryna Lewis said: "We are really chuffed. It's great news for the college and it will now attract more talented footballers to us."

FE sector in spotlight for 'amazing opportunities'

Amazing opportunities are on offer to people and businesses throughout the UK thanks to the vision and drive of the further education sector.

That was the message from Sir Richard Needham, vice-chairman of Dyson Appliances, at the official launch of a groundbreaking new training initiative.

The Roland Academy, based at Walsall College, provides the first industry-accredited training programme in the UK for the display graphics and sign making industries.

It is a partnership between the college and digital technology giant Roland DG that aims to enhance digital sign making skills locally, regionally and nationally.

Sir Richard said: "Colleges throughout the UK are giving people of all ages,

creeds and colour amazing opportunities to learn, relearn and retrain in a wide range of skills. This partnership between Roland and Walsall College is therefore bringing together some of the more progressive thinking in industry and education, and it is enormously important."

He was speaking at Sign UK, the leading international forum for the sign making and digital print business, held at the NEC in Birmingham.

The Roland Academy is the latest in a series of strategic partnerships established by Walsall College, which has also set up links with Apple and Microsoft.

Principal Chris Ball said: "The college is committed to developing leading edge skills that will be of benefit to businesses in a competitive marketplace."

FIRM FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Celebrity builder Tommy Walsh officially opened the first phase of Newcastle-under-Lyme College's new construction training centre. The star of BBC TV's *Ground Force* also hosted a question-and-answer session and judged a construction skills competition.

In addition, as a keen supporter of the Government's Essential Skills campaign, he took time out to present certificates to Skills for Life students who are improving their reading, writing and maths.

The college's new construction facilities provide specialist classrooms and workshops for courses in bricklaying, joinery and painting and decorating.

Plans are already in hand to extend the centre into an adjoining building, and

new courses in electrical installation will be offered from September.

Principal Karen Dobson said: "The new construction centre will have a significant impact on shaping the local workforce for the future.

"In providing this excellent study environment we're responding to the training needs of local employers and enabling young people and adults to develop the skills they need to gain work in one of the area's growing employment areas."

More than 70 full-time and 60 part-time students currently benefit from the facilities,

while a further 120 school pupils aged 14 to 16 attend classes once a week to get a taste of work in the construction industry.



Carpentry student Callum Harris receives the Len Jones Award from Tommy Walsh.



Face to face – sculptor Adam Wilkinson at work on the recreation and, below, the finished result.

College experts give new life to mystery woman

Experts from Stafford College have given new life to a mystery woman whose skull was unearthed in a field by two boys out walking their dog. They were called in after a police investigation which determined that the skull was not a recent burial and could be as much as 600 years old.

A college team led by sculptor Adam Wilkinson recreated the woman's face in a painstaking process that was fully documented by photography students.

"We began by taking a cast of the skull to protect its integrity and then took a series of detailed measurements to allow us to create a face," said Adam.

"We will probably never know who

the woman was or how she came to be in the field but it has been a pleasure getting to know her."

Also involved in the project were craft students who researched and created an authentic piece of headwear.

The two 15-year-olds who discovered the skull visited the college to "meet" the mystery lady, who was aged around 30 when she died.

Also invited were police investigators, archaeologists and residents from the village of



Outwoods, near Gnosall, where the skull was found.

The skull has now been returned to the police forensic team who allowed the college to undertake the project.

'FIRST' FOR PLUMBING APPRENTICES

Twelve plumbing apprentices from Burton College have become the first in the country to gain a brand new City and Guilds qualification.

They all received distinctions after completing their training under tough new guidelines that are aimed at raising skill levels within the construction industry.

Apprentices now undergo longer and more detailed assessments and are also faced with 12 theory exams and a practical task.

Director of employer engagement and marketing Howard Boswell said: "This can only have a positive effect on the industry, and it is a fact that successful candidates will be highly sought after by employers and customers alike."

Burton College's £60,000 specialised assessment centre includes eight room settings which allow trainees to install, test and commission bathrooms, cookers, gas fires, water heaters and boilers together with airing cupboards and unvented system cupboards.

DJ Paul faces grilling from students

Top radio DJ Paul Kershaw found himself in the hotseat when he visited Josiah Mason College in Birmingham.

Paul, who presents the afternoon show on Galaxy 102.2, was grilled by media studies students on topics ranging from how to become a radio DJ to what it is like working in front of thousands of clubbers in Ibiza.

The interview session was organised by lecturer Ian St Peters, who said the college was actively seeking more interaction with local businesses.

"I wanted the students to chat to a media professional to give them the experience of working in the real world," he said. "They performed very well indeed and it was a great experience for all of them."

Quality accolade for Henley College

Henley College Coventry has raised the bar following its reassessment for the Charter Mark quality standard.

It has become the only college in the region to achieve full compliance with the Government's national standard for excellence in customer service.

Charter Mark assessor Leon Winston said: "During all my time at Charter Mark, I cannot recall any organisation achieving the standard unreservedly except Henley College Coventry. The college not only meets the standard but the staff also 'go the extra mile'."

This is the fourth time in succession that the college has been awarded the quality kite mark.

Healthy initiative benefits businesses

A new initiative is helping companies in the West Midlands to become happier and more healthy.

City College Coventry and Warwickshire College are spearheading the Active Learning Companies project, which is funded by the Big Lottery and Sport England.

The aim is to encourage companies to adopt a whole lifestyle approach to learning and well being throughout their workforce, benefiting employers and employees alike.

Building skills for the future

A prestigious new centre for construction training has been opened by Shrewsbury College.

Students will be able to take advantage of state-of-the-art facilities unveiled by the college's centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) at Stafford Park in Telford.

Existing workshops in Shrewsbury are already used to capacity, and a strategic decision was taken to place the new provision near to the M54 and close to the West Midlands conurbation.

CoVE project manager Mac Sandal said: "Many other colleges which have achieved CoVE status in a particular discipline have also found it beneficial to develop beyond their main campus in order to maximise the value to their communities."

"Gaining CoVE status will bring Shrewsbury College £400,000 over three years, money it will use to train some 250 construction students from around the county. This will be of obvious and lasting benefit for the whole of Shropshire."

CoVE administrator Joanne Green, whose first experience of work was on a supermarket checkout, wants to encourage more women to take up careers in construction.

"I didn't do well academically at school and years later that led me to an interest in NVQs and the opportunities they give people like me to progress," she said.

"There are so many opportunities for women in construction, and I want to get more girls to consider it as a career when they leave school."



● Gentle giant Maurice Walcott, above, has achieved his big ambition – a career in childcare. Maurice, 18, who towers at more than 6ft, is just about to complete an early years apprenticeship.

He is one of six male students currently enrolled on childcare courses at South Birmingham College's CoVE-accredited early years, care and health studies division.

Maurice has now been offered full-time employment with a local nursery following a successful three-day-a-week work placement.

He was inspired to pursue a career in childcare following the birth of his youngest sister. "I could see how positive nurturing and guidance could really help shape the future of a child," he said.

● Two major care service providers are celebrating after members of staff achieved NVQ2 in health and social care.

The training was provided through a CoVE in health care operated jointly by Walsall College and the City of Wolverhampton College.

Lonsdale Midlands saw 27 employees gain their qualification in just six months after undergoing an intensive course of tutorials.

Meanwhile employees from Lifeways Community Care, which has a nationwide network of offices, have also been enjoying a high rate of success.



The face of the future – administrator Joanne Green outside the new centre.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES TOP AGENDA

Strategies to engage employers were on the agenda at a workshop held by the BlackCCAT CoVE in engineering. Delegates also discussed ways to combat skills shortages across the Black Country.

The event was held at Dudley College, lead partner in the CoVE, which also involves the colleges of Sandwell, Stourbridge, Wolverhampton and Walsall.

Terry Armstrong, manager of the engineering sector skills taskforce at the Black Country Learning and Skills Council, said: "The workshop

was well represented by both the CoVE partners and other potentially interested organisations. The day was used not only to give an appreciation of the CoVE but also to explore avenues for working together to deliver the core objectives."

Delegates also had an update on Wolverhampton University's new foundation degree in engineering.

The BlackCCAT CoVE was set up in direct response to local skills shortages. Partners work with industry to ensure that training provision is tailored to meet specific regional needs.



Business breakfast – chairman John Wall with fellow members of the Skills Advisory Board.

City initiative aims to bridge the skills gap

A unique initiative is helping to create a future workforce for the business and professional services sector in Birmingham.

More than 10,000 city-based companies are being engaged by an innovative CoVE that aims to bridge the skills gap.

Four colleges – Bournville, Josiah Mason, Sutton Coldfield and Matthew Boulton – are collaborating in the groundbreaking Centre of Business Excellence in Birmingham (CBEB).

They are responding to a forecast by the Learning and Skills Council that an extra 56,000 jobs will be created in the city's professional sectors over the next 10 years.

The CBEB believes that action needs to be taken now to avoid a massive shortfall in the number of people available to fill the vacancies.

Skills Advisory Board chairman John Wall, who is a director of the Allied Irish Bank, said: "This is a unique initiative. It is the first time that four colleges have joined forces in this way in the UK to influence college course content for the better of the city."

He added: "Collectively it is our utmost aim to keep Birmingham growing as a centre of business excellence to attract other companies to the West Midlands and ensure we have the workforce to support this growth."

The board has supported a series of breakfast events for employers from the business and professional services sector. Each breakfast included a speaker to help raise awareness of the skills issues identified within the sector and to challenge the complacency of some of the employers.

CoVE showcase highlights colleges' expertise

The huge contribution that further education makes to the West Midlands economy was put in the spotlight at a showcase event in Brussels.

Delegates from colleges across the region travelled to the heart of European decision-making to highlight their expertise in vocational training.

They also strengthened partnerships with training providers in other parts of Europe and explored opportunities for EU funding.

The two-day event was organised through West Midlands in Europe, which represents the region's interests in Europe.

Delegates led workshops on college centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs) in areas such as engineering,

manufacturing, construction and logistics.

They also took the opportunity to lobby MEPs on the role of colleges in lifelong learning and economic development.

Val Tomlinson, regional director of the Association of Colleges West Midlands, said: "This was an excellent opportunity for colleges to showcase their CoVEs on a European platform and to build transnational links. Future EU funding for colleges will depend increasingly on strong partnerships developing and sharing excellent practice.

"By working closely with West Midlands in Europe the colleges involved are preparing to make the most of future development and funding opportunities."

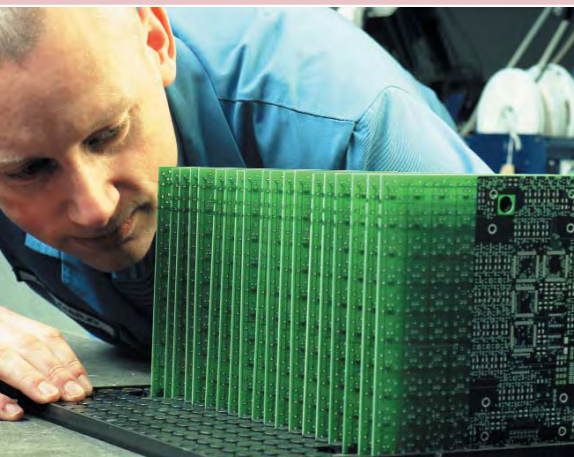
Helping hand for electronics firms

Electronics firms are being offered help to comply with an EU ban on the import of equipment containing lead. They can sign up for a new course in lead-free soldering at Newcastle-under-Lyme College.

The course has been introduced following concerns about the impact of the pending Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directives. From July 1, all

items of EEE (Electronics and Electrical Equipment) that are imported to the EU must be lead-free.

The new training programme is being delivered through the college's CoVE in electrical, electronic and process control engineering. Lecturer Mich Robinson said: "We are working closely with several local companies to help them make the transition to lead-free solders and lead-free components in their workplace."



Award helps record label hit a high note

Kidderminster College's own independent record label, Mighty Atom Smasher (MAS) Records, has hit a really high note.

It has won a top honour from the Learning and Skills Council Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

MAS scooped an award, sponsored by the Government Office for the West Midlands, for the best initiative supported by the European Social Fund.

Creative director Kevyn Gammond said: "In the past three years many bands have developed their talents and communication skills and become more confident performers."

MAS is committed to re-energising the Midlands music scene with innovative schemes that generate real opportunities for the region's artists and industry.

Students and staff step out for £2,000

About £2,000 was raised by staff and students at Ludlow College from a sponsored walk along Offa's Dyke.

The money will go towards the Caitlin Kickstart Award, set up in memory of a former student, which helps to fund a first year in further education. It will also contribute to the new development at the college's Palmers Hall site.

Tutors Ian Millward and Stephen Cass completed the entire 180-mile walk in nine days, with staff and students accompanying them for different sections of the journey.

'Question Time' session for MP

Tuition fees were among the issues raised by Worcester College of Technology students during a "Question Time" session with local MP Michael Foster.

Other topics on the agenda included parking at Worcester Hospital and concerns about the housing market.

The questions were posed by HND public service students following a talk by the MP on the impact of public policy on public services and government departments.

GO-AHEAD FOR SPORTING SCHEME

Young people who are looking for a career in the sport and exercise industry can enrol on a groundbreaking new scheme at Henley College Coventry.

The college has been nominated to deliver the innovative young apprenticeship programme in sports management, leadership and coaching, aimed at 14 to 16-year-olds.

It will be the only college in the West Midlands to offer the programme, and one of only 10 in the whole country.

The nationwide roll-out from September follows a successful pilot run by SkillsActive, the sector skills

council for sport and active leisure.

The aim is to address the issue of school leavers who enter the workplace with poor skills and few qualifications.

College head of leisure and professional studies Alan Shaw said: "A key component of this programme is the provision of work experience, and in this respect we are delighted to have already secured the support of the Coventry Sports Trust and the Coventry Sports Foundation."

The college will be working with eight secondary schools during the first year.



Current sports apprentices work out in Henley College's fitness centre.

Colleges get into gear for Science City initiative

Colleges are gearing up to support the transformation of Birmingham into a Science City. Birmingham was designated a Science City by Chancellor Gordon Brown in the 2005 Budget, along with Nottingham and Bristol.

Advantage West Midlands has now unveiled its plans to turn the concept into reality, supported by partners that include the region's further education sector.

Deputy chairman Norman Price said: "Our vision is that Birmingham Science City will develop and use science and technology to improve the prosperity and quality of life of the city, the West Midlands and the UK."

A key part of the strategy will involve developing the region's skills base to meet the current and future needs of the

economy, focusing on the quality of science and technology education.

Association of Colleges regional director Val Tomlinson said: "We are predicting increased demand for training from young people and employers as a result of the Science City initiative."

"Colleges in the West Midlands have significant expertise in the teaching of science and technology and display an innovative approach to further the science skills base of the region."

"A typical example is the Sixth Form College, Solihull, where engineering students are encouraged to take part in six-month industrial projects."

"Students are also benefiting from the £40 million development at Matthew Boulton College, which specialises in the training of health professionals."

Offenders help to plug construction skills gap

A groundbreaking scheme at Stoke on Trent College is helping to rehabilitate offenders while targeting the skills shortage in the construction industry.

People serving short sentences at Featherstone Prison, near Wolverhampton, are being offered the chance to gain new qualifications and rebuild their lives.

They are taking part in Reconstruction Staffordshire, a pilot project that aims to help address the skills needs of the West Midlands construction sector.

Andy Greenhough, head of the college's enterprise and employment faculty, said: "A lot of people come straight out of prison and re-offend, and one of the main factors behind this is a lack of skills in the changing industrial climate. Our programme aims to break

this cycle and help offenders to build their skills and knowledge."

Candidates undergo a risk assessment before being given the opportunity to gain skills such as plastering and painting and decorating, leading to NVQs.

The first group of 12 has already completed the 12-week course, which it is planned to run four times a year.

The West Midlands construction industry needs more than 7,000 new recruits by 2010.

Sandra Bell, area manager of sector skills council ConstructionSkills, said: "The industry has to consider all possible routes of entry, from young people leaving school and starting apprenticeships to retraining adults who may have been out of work for some time."

'BEST IN THE COUNTRY' ACCOLADE

North Warwickshire and Hinckley College has been named the best in the country for hair and beauty studies.

It triumphed in the prestigious AHT (Association of Hairdressers and Therapists) national competition held in Blackpool.

Colleges from across the country competed against each other in a total of 15 different categories, with North Warwickshire and Hinckley securing one first place, three seconds, one third and one fourth.

The accumulated points won it the title of top college in the country, and helped the Midlands to be named best region.

Curriculum area leader Martin Shelton said: "It is fantastic to see that

the standard that our learners are consistently achieving has been recognised. I am proud of all the staff and students whose skill and

commitment have helped to clinch this outstanding honour.

"We are constantly looking to improve on our already excellent achievements, and for hair and beauty this includes the launch of a higher education programme which will enable people to continue with their studies to this level."

The success comes on top of the college's Beacon Award

for its work with 14 to 16-year-olds and a Colleges Innovating with Business Award for its collaboration with Sainsbury's.



Body painters Bernadette Malczewski, left and Emma Siggie took children's toys as their theme.

Young engineers take top places at NEC

Budding engineers from the Sixth Form College, Solihull, walked off with top place awards from a prestigious event held at the NEC in Birmingham.

They were among 48 teams from colleges and schools across the West Midlands who presented the results of their six-month industrial projects at a celebration day organised by the Engineering Education Scheme.

Judges awarded first place to four Solihull students who worked with Goodrich plc to produce a device that loads aircraft engine control modules into an environmental test chamber.

Second place went to another Solihull team who worked with Jaguar to develop a unit that displays essential information directly on to a car windscreen.

Hands up for hospital visitors

Students from Sandwell College took part in an infection control research programme at their local hospital.

They monitored the use of an antibacterial hand gel by doctors, visitors, patients and staff in five selected wards at Sandwell Hospital.

Findings by the first year BTEC national health and social care students revealed that the largest proportion of people not using the gel were visitors.

Gill York, practice development manager at the hospital, praised the students for their hard work.

Young performers in the spotlight

Performing arts students from the City of Stoke on Trent Sixth Form College were asked to stage a brand new musical at the Lowry Arts and Entertainment Centre in Manchester.

This followed their participation in a National Theatre project in which professional playwrights are commissioned to write new plays for and about young people.

The students impressed organisers with their production of Feather Boy, created by a team including award-winning writer Nicky Singer.

Skillbuild showcases region's talent

Construction students from across the West Midlands showed off their skills in a prestigious competition.

They took part in the regional heats of Skillbuild, the showcase for youth excellence in the construction industry.

The event was hosted by South Birmingham College at its Centre for the Built Environment, which is one of the biggest construction training and education centres in Europe.

Visitors included specially invited schoolchildren as well as companies who are involved in all aspects of the Midland construction industry.

The winners will now go forward to the national finals in October.

New future on tap for ex-Rover workers

A group of ex-Rover employees have taken the first step in their quest to become qualified plumbers.

They have completed a training programme at Stourbridge College, which has led a number of initiatives on behalf of the Rover Taskforce.

Course tutor Steve Edis said: "Two of the trainees have already found work placements and we are seeking local companies to help the remainder gain work experience."

The project involved the college working in partnership with Industry Development Services Ltd, part of the Lower Gornal-based CHN Group.

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'OUTSTANDING' ACCOLADE FOR COLLEGE

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College has won the accolade of "outstanding" from government inspectors.

This makes it the only sixth form or general further education college in Birmingham or Solihull to have ever received an overall Grade 1 classification.

The accolade follows the award of Beacon status by the Department for Education and Skills in 2004 in acknowledgement of the college's exceptional work.

Principal Lynne Morris said: "Ofsted has awarded the college its prestigious top grade which only goes to schools and colleges where the quality of teaching and support is outstanding.

"This double achievement reflects the hard work of staff, governors and students, and puts us amongst the very few top colleges in England.

"We shall continue to work hard – to strive ever forward – so that we can continue to provide each of our students with an outstanding education."



An artist's impression of Burton College's new university centre.

£4.3m development set to boost region's economy

A £4.3 million university centre at Burton College is set to provide a huge boost for the region's economy. It will more than double the number of college students on higher education courses, having a big impact on opportunities for people and businesses.

Building work has already started on the new development, which is due to open in September 2007.

It will be complemented by a £2.3 million apprenticeship skills centre that will provide a realistic and practical environment in which to train and work.

The first phase, comprising state-of-the-art motor vehicle facilities, is set to open in September. It will be followed in February 2007 by leading edge workshops for engineering and manufacturing skills.

The college is working in partnership with Staffordshire University.

Principal Keith Norris said: "These exciting developments will provide local people with the opportunity to develop the skills they need to achieve their full potential in whatever area they choose to follow."

The university centre will include a lean manufacturing centre that replicates an authentic factory environment and 15 start-up units for small businesses.

Local employers have been consulted to ensure that the courses on offer meet their needs for a skilled workforce.

Mr Norris added: "The university centre marks a radical departure from the more traditional universities and will focus on developing the skills necessary to support the economic restructuring of the local area.

"We believe that it will certainly make a significant contribution to the success of the local and regional economy."