



**Client:** World Skills UK Yellow News  
**Source:** The Sunday Telegraph  
**Date:** 20/08/2017

**Keyword:** Team UK  
**Page:** 8  
**Reach:** 359400  
**Size:** 415  
**Value:** 9495.20

## ‘Olympics of skills’ helping Britain’s apprentices to escape the shadows

Vocational training is on the rise and no longer ‘for other people’s children’, writes *Alan Tovey*

**T**he world’s best brickie is British and he’s got the gold medal to prove it. Yet you’ve probably never heard of Ashley Terron, who saw off international challengers in 2013 to claim the title of top bricklayer at the WorldSkills competition, the “Olympics” of vocational training. “I knew I’d done well. People were saying I’d smashed it but until my name came up as gold medallist I wasn’t sure,” says Terron. “When I saw I’d won I went wild.”

Terron, then an apprentice, scored 89.35pc, meaning he was millimetres from perfect across the three brick projects he built at the biennial event. It’s a score yet to be bettered.

His abilities were recognised while at college and he was selected for mentoring by WorldSkills UK, the body that champions apprenticeships. That work paid off at the competition in Leipzig, Germany, and he was awarded the British Empire Medal after his victory in the competition for people under 23. His success helped land him a job at one of Britain’s biggest construction companies on a promotional fast track.

Competitors from other nations had their performances televised in their home countries, with winners being awarded jobs for life and, in some cases, houses. “We got a pat on the back for representing Britain,” says Terron. “But at the end of the day, skills like this are the UK’s backbone – nothing runs without them.”

The young Warrington man’s experience at the competition, which showcases vocational skills, reflects the UK’s perception of apprenticeships.

“There’s a view by some parents that apprenticeships are for other people’s children,” says Neil Bentley, chief executive of WorldSkills UK, which is funded by government and industry. “We’re looking for the best of the best to compete at an international level and show there is a rewarding alternative to a university degree.”

Apprenticeships are increasingly seen as attractive by school leavers, who are balking at racking up £30,000 of debt pursuing a degree. The prospect of earning while they

learn is not lost on young people either, with a CEBR study calculating an engineer who went through an apprenticeship would be £80,000 better off than academic peers.

The Government is also pushing vocational education as a way to plug skills gaps. Earlier this year it launched the apprenticeship levy, which requires companies with an annual wage bill of £3m or more to pay 0.5pc of their staff costs into a fund to pay for training courses, with the aim of creating 3m apprentices by 2020.

But while the impetus is there to get more people into apprenticeships, events such as the WorldSkills competitions are needed to highlight

*‘Ahead of Brexit, showing Britain has the ability to grow its own talent is a powerful signal’*

the relevance of vocational education. Terron says a family connection meant he wanted to become an apprentice bricklayer when he left school, despite getting strong GCSEs.

**Client:** World Skills UK Yellow News  
**Source:** The Sunday Telegraph  
**Date:** 20/08/2017

**Keyword:** Team UK  
**Page:** 8  
**Reach:** 359400  
**Size:** 415  
**Value:** 9495.20

"I was pulled to one side by a teacher and asked 'What are you doing? You're better than that,'" he recalls. "I found it offensive – especially as I knew by the age of 19 I could be earning £50,000 if I was good at it."

Terron's perseverance paid off with the world title. Now WorldSkills UK is aiming to create more role models like him. In the 2013 competition, Britain was 10th in the medal table with two golds, a silver and three bronzes, and two years later at São Paulo had moved

up to seventh, ahead of Germany, despite its long-established apprenticeship tradition.

For this year's competition in Abu Dhabi in October, WorldSkills UK is treating it like the Olympic sporting campaign, looking for any incremental gain to eke out the best from the near 40-strong team, who will compete in about half of the disciplines. As well as mentors to boost their abilities, along with nutritional and dietary advice, British competitors have performance coaches such as Peter Bakare, the former UK Olympian, on their side.

"The parallels between sport and skills are huge," says Bakare, who represented Britain in volleyball in the 2012 Olympics. "We're trying to get them past mental barriers, just like in sport. We're setting goals and managing their training. They are willing to try, and try, and try but without focus they might practise the wrong things. And just like sport, only fractions separate gold and silver."

Success at the international level also sends out a message to the world, according to Bentley. "As we look to Brexit, showing Britain has the ability to grow its own talent and produce people with the skills needed for the economy to succeed is a powerful signal." He admits that while not everyone who takes on an apprenticeship can contend to be an international champion, highlighting the success of those who do reach such a level is inspirational for others.

Being chosen to represent Team UK in Abu Dhabi has been a life-changing event for Dan McCabe, who will be competing in the 3D video game design category. "This has redefined everything I perceived myself to be," says the 19-year-old from the Wirral.

"It has reinvented me into someone I didn't think I could be. At school I wanted to be a games developer but expected I would just get a normal office job." However, his abilities were recognised by WorldSkills UK and he won gold for Britain in the European heat in Sweden where he created a car for the *Need For Speed* video game.

His win helped him land a job as a 3D artist with Codemasters and he says he has no regrets about pursuing an apprenticeship. "We've got a queue of people with masters degrees knocking on the door of our studio trying to get a job, while I'm already here doing the job and representing Britain," he says. "There's no better way of showing what you can do than by becoming an apprentice."



Bricklayer Ashley Terron, 25, with his gold medal from the WorldSkills Leipzig 2013