Ray Stubbs visits East of England to launch The Big Skill Awards 2009

Ray Stubbs, BBC Sports presenter and former professional footballer, is this week visiting six counties across the region to launch The Big Skill Awards 2009 and try his hand at learning a new skill with the help of learners from the East of England.

The Big Skill initiative is organised by the Learning and Skills Council in partnership with BBC East to recognise people from the region who have improved their own life or the lives of others through learning.

The Big Skill first ran in 2008 and following its success in Norfolk is being rolled out across the region with support from Ray Stubbs and Barbara Follett, Minister for the East of England, who are both championing the initiative.

Ray said: “I am delighted to be supporting The Big Skill and its launch across the region – learning new skills can really improve lives which is why this is such a worthwhile initiative. It is so important that regardless of age, people continue to learn new skills – it can have such a positive impact on your life and on the lives of others. I wish everyone who enters The Big Skill Awards lots of luck.”

The Big Skill Awards are open to anyone over the age of 14, who lives and learns in the East of England. The seven award categories are:

- 14–16 Learner Award
- 17–19 Learner Award
- Adult Learner Award
- Skills for the Community Award
- Skills for Work Award
- Employer Commitment to Skills Award
- The Learners’ Champion Award.
A celebration of award winners will take place across the region in June - compered by BBC presenters and supported by Ray Stubbs. Local schools, colleges and training providers from the six counties will also showcase various opportunities available and people will be encouraged to try their hand at learning a new skill.

Graham Brough, Area Director, LSC Norfolk said: “We encourage all East of England learners and training providers, schools and colleges to enter The Big Skill Awards. Last year’s awards were a huge success and so many people were inspired by the nominees and winners who had excelled in learning and gaining new skills.

There are so many learning opportunities available across the region and The Big Skill is all about people having a go – we want more people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in learning, develop new skills and be given every opportunity to fulfil their potential.”

Barbara Follett, Minister for the East of England said: "I welcome the opportunity to champion The Big Skill as its awards acknowledge people's dedication to improve their lives and those of others through learning. As Minister for the East of England, I believe that it is essential to invest in skills across our region in order to ensure that our workforce is world-class by 2020."

Tim Bishop, Head of Region, BBC East added; “The BBC has a commitment to inform, entertain and to educate and we see this partnership with the Learning and Skills Council as a natural development of that. We look forward to seeing what The Big Skill 2009 has to offer.”

Award nomination forms will soon be available for download at www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/eastofengland/aboutus/bigskill where forms can be emailed or printed off and posted. Alternatively, please telephone 01234 341200 and request a nomination form to be sent in the post. The closing date for nominations is 5pm on Friday 17 April 2009.

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Notes to editors
For further information please contact Lindsey Roffe or Dawn Humphreys at Tribe on 01603 417722 lindsey@tribepr.com / dawn@tribepr.com
Key dates for The Big Skill Awards 2009
5pm on Friday 17 April 2009 – deadline and closing date for nominations
20 April – 8 May 2009 – judging takes place
June 2009 – The Big Skill showcase events and awards ceremonies take place with Ray Stubbs across the region.

About the Learning and Skills Council
The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) aims to improve the skills of young people and adults to ensure that England has a workforce of world class standard by 2020.

The LSC:
- provides free training programmes to young people and adults employed in local businesses
- plans and funds education and training in schools, colleges and sixth forms
- provides advice and supports people wanting to continue in, or return to, education
- provides financial support to young people and adults to allow them to continue in education

About BBC East
BBC East is built around six local radio stations and online sites - Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Three Counties (Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire).