The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has announced winners of the 2007 national Apprenticeship Awards. England’s top apprentices and apprentice employers were recognised at a glittering ceremony in London last night, hosted by TV presenter Nick Knowles.

Now in their fourth year, the Awards are designed to recognise the hard work and commitment of young people currently on, or who have recently completed an Apprenticeship, and employers who are successfully using Apprenticeships to improve business performance. This year the awards attracted more than 1,000 entries.

**Recognising England’s top apprentices**

Electrical engineering apprentice, 23 year old Gareth Moor from Morpeth, Northumberland, won the prized Advanced Apprentice of the Year award.

His employer, Chris Burt, director of Dougal and Railton, says: “Gareth has shown tremendous promise whilst working with us. He has been involved in major projects for the company, where he has had important roles of responsibility, and truly demonstrated the benefits of training on the job. He is a valuable asset to our team and has really benefited from his Apprenticeship.”
Commenting on his win, Gareth said on the night: "I am over the moon. My Apprenticeship has given me the ability to prove myself. I learnt skills at college, but my Apprenticeship meant that I could apply them in the workplace. My employers have been so supportive - without them I would never have won this award. I wrote 320 applications before I got my Apprenticeship, and once I got it, it made me determined to be the best."

Jonathon Pearson, 22, an apprentice at Lancashire based Schwan’s Consumer Brands, was honoured with the Apprentice of the Year title. Jonathon joined the company in 2001 and enrolled on an Apprenticeship in Food and Drink Manufacturing Operations. Due to his quick grasp of the role and the skills needed to succeed, Jonathon was promoted to deputy team leader within five months of completing his Apprenticeship - a massive accomplishment for someone of his age.

Commenting on his win, Jonathon said: "It's brilliant. I never thought I would win. My Apprenticeship has given me so much - confidence, success, leadership, everything - and my company has supported me all the way."

Jonathon’s employer, Mike Hyland, business improvement manager describes Jonathon as a role model to other employees.

Top prize in the Large Employer of the Year category was awarded to BT. Apprenticeships are at the heart of the business and recruitment strategy at BT, and the 99,000 strong workforce currently includes 862 apprentices. A campaign is underway to increase this number to 1,364 by September 2007.

Upon winning the award, Dave Walsh, head of BT Apprenticeships said: "I am absolutely delighted to win the Large Employer of the Year Award. It's recognition of all the work we have invested in Apprenticeships and a real team effort. Apprenticeships are a fabulous opportunity for individuals to come in and develop their life, academic and technical skills."

Abbigail Kewin, from Tyne and Wear, is this year’s winner of the Young Apprentice of the Year. Abbigail, 15, is currently working towards an equivalent of 14 GCSEs, including her
BTEC First Diploma, and has plans to undertake further art courses and map a career in advertising. The judges were impressed by the positive and demonstrable impact on all the employers and staff she has worked with, her support for fellow students as well as all her achievements so far.

Abbigail, delighted with her win, said: "I'm so excited. The other finalists were so good, I didn't think I was going to win. I'm missing my school prom to be here tonight, and I have been getting texts from my friends all night asking about the Awards. They are going to be so pleased when they hear I've won."

The Personal Achiever of the Year award was won this year by Zenel Lika, 19, who fled Kosovo to the UK in 2002, after his house was attacked by masked gunmen. Although he could speak no English on arriving in the UK, Zenel's academic achievements here have been remarkable. By the end of Year 11, he had successfully passed his GCSE Maths, Science, English and Art and after leaving school, Zenel’s good academic results enabled him to progress to an Advanced Apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering. Last year, Zenel won the Workforce Development Learner of the Year for North Warwickshire & Hinckley College.

Zenel said of his win: "I can't describe how it feels to win. I am so proud, it means such a lot to me. It's all down to the encouragement I've had from my foster parents and my company."

Awards presenter, Nick Knowles, was struck by the high calibre of entrants and said that he was a big advocate of Apprenticeships, for both young people and employers. He commented: "One thing I've learnt from my DIY SOS show is what a difference skilled professionals can make to your home. Apprentices turn up, take something on, and finish it - that's why Apprenticeships are so successful. I'm deeply impressed, and these Awards have been truly inspiring. It's been a privilege to see so many successful employers and apprentices here tonight."
Stephen Gardner, Director of Apprenticeships at the Learning and Skills Council said: “It really is awe-inspiring to witness the dedication, drive and enthusiasm of these apprentices - not only those who have achieved so much to win awards, but all apprentices around the country who are pursuing their goals.

“It is clear that to remain competitive, we need to ensure more people are learning useful skills and Apprenticeships have shown themselves to be very successful at making that happen, while giving people and businesses real opportunities to succeed. The Awards are now in their fourth year – a positive sign of the outstanding contribution individuals and UK businesses are making to raise skills levels and improve productivity and competitiveness nationally. This year’s Awards entries have been first rate and the winners deserve recognition and huge respect.”

Speaking at the event, Skills Minister Phil Hope MP said: "Thanks to dynamic young people, enlightened employers and a supportive delivery system, I see a bright future for Apprenticeships. They stimulate innovation, give businesses the skills they need and provide opportunities for individuals to fulfil their potential. The Apprenticeship programme makes a real difference to all concerned and I’m delighted to see such great examples at the Awards tonight."

Sponsors for the 2007 Apprenticeship Awards are:

- City & Guilds (Premier Sponsor)
- QCA (Apprentice of the Year Category sponsor)
- BT Openreach (Advanced Apprentice of the Year Category Sponsor)
- British Gas (Personal Achiever of the Year Category Sponsor)
- BAE Systems (Young Apprentice of the Year Category Sponsor)
- Edexcel (Employer of the Year Category Sponsor)
- L’Oreal Professional; Bentley; Whitbread; O2; e-skillsUK; The Communications Network and Connexions (Gift, Bespoke and Table Sponsors)
Chris Humphries, Director General at City & Guilds, Premier Sponsor of the 2007 Apprenticeship Awards, said: “Congratulations to all of this year’s winners and finalists. Our own research has shown how people who start their careers as apprentices often use their vocational background to great effect, becoming industry leaders or household names. Hopefully, this crop of apprentices will go on to emulate the success of some of their predecessors, such as Stella McCartney and Sir Terry Matthews.”

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Notes to editors:

The Apprentice Category winners

Young Apprentice of the Year
Abbigail Kewin, Tyne & Wear (Arts & Design)

Apprentice of the Year
Jonathon Pearson, Preston (Food & Drink Manufacture)

Advanced Apprentice of the Year
Gareth Moor, Morpeth, Northumberland (Electrical Engineering)

Personal Achiever of the Year
Zenel Lika, Atherstone, Warwickshire (Mechanical Engineering)

The Employer Category winners
Micro Employer of the Year
Blue Flame, Stockport

Small Employer of the Year
Farthings Veterinary Group, Horsham

Medium Employer of the Year
Slack and Parr Ltd, Kegworth

Large Employer of the Year
BT, London

Learning and Skills Council:
The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.