

## WALES' YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS 'ROCK' AT BIG PITCH 2011



Nick Hewer (BBC1 *The Apprentice* fame and **Patron of Big Pitch**) and students

### **Background:**

*"Big Pitch is a great way to engage young learners and to challenge their aspirations and ideas. It's essential in this type of economic climate that we equip students with the entrepreneurial skills and experience to make them more competitive both at home and in the global market."*

**(Jeff Cuthbert AM, Deputy Minister for Skills, Welsh Government, Big Pitch 2011)**

The 'Big Pitch' Challenge was originally developed as part of the Heads of the Valleys Innovation Programme (see [www.hovip.org.uk](http://www.hovip.org.uk)) and contributed to HOVIP becoming the UK Enterprise Support Initiative of 2010 in the Awards judged by the UK Sector Skills Council for Enterprise.

The purpose was to address a strategic and 'live' business challenge in the south Wales valleys and engage further education college students to generate new ideas and, at the same time, enhance their enterprise and employability skills. This also supported the Welsh Government's Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy.



Following a local pilot in 2009 and successful regional event in 2010, focused on Rhymney Brewery's new visitor centre (see <http://bit.ly/z6sY6h>), teams of college students from Coleg Gwent, Coleg Morgannwg, Merthyr Tydfil College and The College Ystrad Mynach, were tasked with developing imaginative means of marketing another real business – the Rock UK Summit Centre, in Trelewis, as the focus of Big Pitch 2011.

Rock UK (a registered charity), a major inward investor, has just obtained planning permission to undertake a £2.5 million refurbishment project, on the site of a former drift mine, which will develop the facility as a centre of excellence for climbing and outdoor education and residential facilities in the heart of the Welsh Valleys.

### **Objectives:**

The main aims of Big Pitch 2011 were to: enhance student enterprise and employability skills, further promote business / education links in the Valleys and support regional businesses. This included encouraging innovative proposals, from the students, for the Summit Centre customer offer and related marketing.

The initiative was primarily funded by the Welsh Government and co-sponsored by Rhymney Brewery, Capita Symonds and the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) given the emphasis on vocational learning. The Valleys Regional Park / WECAN Project, which is focused on using the natural environment as a driver for social and economic regeneration in the south Wales valleys, also provided sponsorship and support.

## Approach:

The project team was a third sector and public sector partnership involving Groundwork Wales and the Enterprise Champions from the four Colleges in the Valleys, with additional support from the private sector.

Tutors from each College were briefed (e.g. see <http://bit.ly/yIcBok>) and their students invited to participate in local selection processes, focused on real challenges (e.g. see <http://bit.ly/yKtN8P>). Two teams, each comprised of four students, were chosen to represent each College in the final event. The selected students were then trained in marketing and presentation skills and how to write a press release by business experts (CIOTEK Ltd., Equinox Communications Ltd. and Helen Murdoch Marketing Ltd.), and taken on a site visit to the Summit Centre, to use the facilities and meet staff, before being tasked to do the following:

1. Generate ideas on what the customer offer should be.
2. Develop a related marketing plan based on a notional budget of £10,000.
3. Produce a press release for the launch of the customer offer.
4. Deliver a 15 minute presentation on all the above to an invited audience.

The final task required the eight student teams to present their recommendations to four judges (Ruth Badger, a former finalist in *The Apprentice*; Rachel Allen, Summit Centre Director; Jon Knox, Head of Built Environment at Capita Symonds and Eryl Jones, Managing Director of Equinox Communications) and an audience in The Pierhead Building, Cardiff Bay (see the event footage at <http://bit.ly/yruFOm>). This landmark venue is close to where the first million pound business deal was struck.

## Outcomes:

The winning teams were: in 1<sup>st</sup> place: **Frugality** (Coleg Morgannwg), 2<sup>nd</sup> place: **Forward Footsteps** (Coleg Gwent) and 3<sup>rd</sup> place: **Top of the Rocks** (Coleg Gwent). The key outcomes were:

- 265 students (more than double 2010) participated in Big Pitch 2011
- 125 people registered to attend the final event (87 attended on the day)
- 89% of the students who participated in the final event increased their confidence (the remainder felt there was no change and, importantly, no one felt that it had decreased)
- Enterprise, essential and key skills were developed and enhanced including direct links to curriculum areas such as the Welsh Baccalaureate and a Tutorial Enrichment Programme
- All four College Principals repeated their support for the initiative to continue
- All eight tutors who participated in the final were willing to support the initiative if continued
- Rock UK is investigating five of the 26 ideas raised by the students, including linking the John Muir Environmental Award (which encourages people to discover, explore and conserve the outdoors) to their offer and have engaged Merthyr Tydfil College to produce videos of the Summit Centre
- Eight Valleys businesses benefited
- £13268 worth of free pre and post event publicity with 619,638 'opportunities to view' the media coverage, was generated. This equates to a return on PR investment of 1:26.
- Video footage of the student presentations has been produced as a wider learning resource
- Later evidence from the 2010 event showed that outcomes included the students using their experience to enhance job and university applications, which we hope will be repeated.

*"The final event was a brilliant day and I'm very grateful to have been involved in such a worthy venture, giving a fantastic enterprising opportunity for young people. It's encouraging to see young people striving to do their best. We have plans for a £2.5million refurbishment and it's great to think that we could be implementing some of the students' ideas in the near future."*

*(Rachel Allen, Centre Director of Rock UK Summit Centre)*

## For more information:

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