

Gold for Severn Valley Railway apprentice

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Congratulations to one of the **Severn Valley Railway's** heritage engineering apprentices who has scooped a gold medal in the prestigious WorldSkills UK competition.

Twenty-two-year-old Jack Kerswill is based at the railway's boiler shop in Bridgnorth, Shropshire, and was competing in the construction metalwork category. Before gaining his place in the finals of the competition, he had to undergo a seven-month process of regional heats and intensive training.

"I'm really happy at how far I've come," said Jack on hearing of his success. "It's been a long road getting here. The help and support from colleagues along the way has been invaluable, and winning the gold medal makes it all worthwhile.

"The two days of the finals were quite nerve-wracking, but at the same time I enjoyed the pressure of competing alongside others. Our task was to produce four construction metalwork modules, which all came together to make a small stove. This tested us on a range of skills, such as oxyacetylene cutting, welding and using tools such as guillotines and angle grinders.

"We were given a basic set of plates to mark out, cut out and then find an efficient way of clamping it all together, ready for welding, all the time bearing in mind the tight tolerances you were being judged on."

Jack is three years into his four-year apprenticeship as a boilermith with the SVR. He attends a day-release course at Dudley College in the West Midlands.

“We couldn’t be prouder of Jack,” said Duncan Ballard, the SVR’s head of steam engineering. “He’s a shining example of someone who’s not only extremely talented, but is also prepared to work hard for what he wants to achieve. With young people like him coming into the heritage sector, we know that the future of our locomotives and rolling stock is going to be in good hands.”

The Severn Valley Railway has a number of young people within its pioneering Heritage Apprenticeship Scheme. This was established to ensure the continuation of the specialised skills that are needed to overhaul and maintain the railway’s fleet of steam locomotives and heritage carriages.

More than 500 young students and apprentices took part in the WorldSkills UK finals in over 60 disciplines. The organisation is an independent charity and a partnership between employers, education and governments. It promotes the use of international best practice to raise standards in apprenticeships and technical education so more young people and employers succeed.

The winners of the 2022 awards were announced by Steph McGovern, the presenter of Channel 4’s *Packed Lunch*, who said: “What a brilliant result. We need to ensure that these fantastic achievements encourage others to follow in their footsteps. Skills have the power to transform lives and economies. WorldSkills UK competitions show how the UK is brimming with brilliant young people doing exceptional things.”

Photo credit: Lesley Carr