



## **Telford Polymer Industries first 'Learning and Earning' schools event An outstanding success**

A schools awareness event organised by the Telford Polymer Association was held on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March with over 200 pupils and 25 teachers taking part. In an exciting and innovative day of demonstrations and talks pupils and teachers were informed of the use of polymers, the polymer industry and career opportunities in the Telford and Shropshire area. The event was hosted by the University of Wolverhampton, at its Telford campus and Polymer Training Ltd with activities running concurrently throughout the day.

TPA Chairman, Dr Mark Brenner describes the day as "an outstanding success with all participants from teachers, pupils, companies and colleges benefiting. A number of teachers remarked on how otherwise cynical pupils had responded with enthusiasm and interest."

Participants on the day had the chance to meet and hear Professor Heinz Wolff, Professor of Bio-Engineering at Brunel University, who gave a guest lecture on the use of polymers in everyday life. Professor Wolff is best remembered as the presenter of many science programmes such as 'The Great Egg Race' and gave his trademark presentation with the characteristic blend of scientific content and humour to a spellbound audience who witnessed him develop a 'six fingered hand'!

The motivation and momentum for the event came from a set of mutual objectives identified for local education authorities, local companies and local government offices. David Wright, MP for Telford gave the initiative his wholehearted support, "the Schools Awareness concept should enable us to harness the talents of Telford children and promote a high skill/high value industrial sector in the town."

To provide continuous interest and ongoing schools involvement a design competition was launched on the awareness day with a number of cash prizes sponsored by Maxell (Europe) Ltd and English Partnerships. Pupils are invited to design an innovative product or artefact that uses polymers as the principal material. Selected designs will go forward with the opportunity to develop prototype models using computer aided design and rapid prototyping facilities at the Innovative Product Development Centre at the University of Wolverhampton. Exhibition and final judging will take place at next years awareness event.

Philip Law, Public & Industrial Affairs Director of the British Plastics Federation, saw this as "an exceptionally valuable event..... With its detailed local focus pulling together schools, businesses, academic institutions and development

agencies, this can only be positive for the region. The plastics industry has a strong following in the West Midlands and has a lot to offer young people in search of attractive careers. At the very least schoolchildren will be given a positive introduction to the important role manufacturing plays in the economy and a broader appreciation of how technologies such as plastics help society.”

The event was funded by Advantage West Midlands, with further contribution from English Partnerships in sponsoring the design competition.

Arising from the success in generating school interest and industry links to the polymer sector, Advantage West Midlands have in principal agreed to fund further events on an annual basis for the next two years.

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