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**N E W S R E L E A S E**

**Students receive first class careers experience despite Covid restrictions**

In the midst of the covid pandemic when all non-essential businesses had their doors closed to visitors, students found it near impossible to secure physical work experience, however help was at hand as [Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust](http://www.vaht.co.uk/), Buckinghamshire Skills Hub’s [Bucks Enterprise Adviser Network](https://bbf.uk.com/business-support/enterprise-advisor-network) and Aylesbury High School, worked in partnership to ensure students still received first class careers education.

Pioneered by Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust, the partners rose to the challenge by creating a competition for the students to ‘Design a home for the future’. The aim of the competition was to enable students to meet a range of people from the workplace and have extensive two-way interaction with these employees. All 182 Year 8 students at Aylesbury High School participated in the competition, which included some outstanding entries. Pupils were able to ask questions and received answers and feedback through regular online tutor sessions with employees from Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust.

The competition was sponsored by Edgar Taylor Construction, with shopping vouchers awarded to the top three entries and a tree to be planted in the school grounds by the winning team.

Marina Jackson, Under 19 Skills Manager & Careers Hub Lead, Buckinghamshire Skills Hub, said: “Students worked in small groups and were able to acquire employability skills such communication and team working, as well as developing their time and project management capability, not to mention design and creativity skills. The students researched themes of sustainability and technology innovation, design and construction techniques and presentation ideas before presenting their final designs.”

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Buckinghamshire Skills Hub is working with Daniel Cope, Low Carbon Workspaces Programme Manager at Ngage Solutions, who said: “I’m stunned at not only the innovation, but also the

professionalism of all proposals put forward for ‘Design a home for the future’ by students. The projects highlight the importance renewable energy will play in the UK’s ambition to reach Net Zero by 2050. It’s also refreshing to see that many of the teams have recognised that enriching biodiversity and nature is imperative for a clean and healthy environment.”

The Year 8 competition winners were Esther and Megan (photo attached), with runner-up winners Amelie, Brianna, Hannah, Jessica, Lakshanika and Lily.

Feedback from students was extremely positive, with such comments as: “I plan on becoming an architect and have really enjoyed exploring new ideas for house construction”, and “Really enjoyed the experience and have learnt a lot from it. Thank you for this amazing opportunity!”

Year 8 students at the school are now able to demonstrate on their CVs and college/university application forms that they have an experience of a workplace. An unexpected benefit of this initiative was that once other employers heard about the task on LinkedIn, they contacted the Trust so that they could replicate the project at their schools, including as far away as Dorset.

Julie Porter, Executive Director of Development at Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust and Enterprise Adviser to Aylesbury High School commented: “It was great to have the support of the teaching staff at Aylesbury High School and Buckinghamshire Skills Hub to facilitate this

online work experience challenge. I was struck by the enthusiasm and commitment from the students and the way that they engaged with the tasks set each week during the six week competition. The most difficult part was judging the fantastic entries! I’m looking forward to

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physically meeting the winning team when we visit the school for the prize giving and tree planting ceremony. I’ll also be taking along some Highly Commended certificates – in fact we’ve had to print more of these than I was expecting as the standard was so high.”

For all your skills and careers needs please visit our new Bucks Skills Hub website at: [www.bucksskillshub.org](http://www.bucksskillshub.org) or email one of the team at [info@bucksskillshub.org](mailto:info@bucksskillshub.org) or call 01494 927130.

**Ends**

**Photo caption: *‘****Design a home for the future’ competition winners Esther and Megan.*

**Note to editors**

The [**Buckinghamshire Skills Hub**](https://bucksskillshub.org/) promotes and optimises links between the business community and education/training providers to enable young people and adults to gain valuable insight into career opportunities, and helps them develop the skills and qualifications they need to progress in the workplace at whatever stage of their career they are in.

The Bucks Skills Hub is managed by Buckinghamshire Business First and supported by Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Buckinghamshire Council and the Careers Enterprise Company.

The [**Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership**](http://buckstvlep.co.uk/) (Bucks LEP) is a business-led ‘partnership of equals’ between local government and the private sector, building the conditions for sustainable economic growth in the County. Formed in January 2012, the partnership balances a uniquely strong collective business voice with a cohesive elected local leadership. Coming together to engineer the conditions needed to drive forward business prosperity in the county and beyond, Bucks LEP recognises that an important part of this is to support education and skills providers and employers to ensure our young people have the right skills to meet the needs of the economy, including the growth sectors such as life-sciences, space, creative industries and advanced engineering. Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership funded the new [Bucks Skills Hub website](http://www.bucksskillshub.org/) as part of its Covid Recovery Programme.

[**Buckinghamshire Business First**](http://www.bbf.uk.com/) (BBF) is the Growth Hub for Buckinghamshire and is backed by Buckinghamshire-based entrepreneurs, thousands of SMEs and Buckinghamshire Council. BBF provides the link between public policy and the business community in Buckinghamshire and works with partners to create a dynamic business environment in the Entrepreneurial Heart of Britain.

[**Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust**](http://www.vaht.co.uk) is a ‘not-for-profit’ Registered Social Landlord, providing affordable housing for over 23,000 people living and working in Aylesbury Vale and beyond.

It owns and manages over 8,000 homes, across Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, South Northamptonshire and South Oxfordshire. The Trust make a significant social and economic contribution to the communities in which it operates, and its Board intend to build over 1,000 new affordable homes over the next five years.

Registered Social Landlords are assessed and rated by the Regulator of Social Housing to ensure that they effectively manage their affairs and have financial capacity to deal with a wide range of adverse financial scenarios. The Trust has the top-rated assessments from the Regulator of G1 for governance and V1 for financial viability.

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