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L-R: Niall McKillion, Haldane Fisher, Gareth Spratt and Clifford Wharry, NRC tutors, Helen Hampsey, NRC Manager, Jamie Matthews, apprentice/competitor, and Charlie McAuley and Moya Leonard, Mivan.

NINE STUDENTS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND'S REGIONAL COLLEGES COMPETED IN THE UK **SKILLBUILD** NATIONAL FINAL HELD IN MILTON KEYNES OVER NOVEMBER 21-23...

## NI apprentices recognised as among the best in the UK

Nine Northern Ireland apprentices competing in the UK **Skillbuild** National Final have brought home three medals and two highly commended awards.

Two competitors from Southern Regional College (SRC), Jacqui Hawthorne from Keady and Patryk Niedoba from Dunmurry, were placed first in their respective categories of painting and decorating and tiling.

Another SRC student, Josh McBride from Killeel, placed third in plastering. And highly commended recognition went to Northern Regional College (NRC) apprentices Bailey Gibson from Larne

in carpentry and Jamie Matthews from Ballyclare in joinery. Also competing in the event, having progressed through the regional heats, were SRC students Erin McKnight (painting and decorating), Niall Rice from Castlwellan (bricklaying), and Conor Braniff from Portaferry (tiling). And representing North West Regional College at the event, held in Milton Keynes over November 21-23, was Timothy Gilmore from Coleraine (tiling).

All nine students were selected to compete in the UK final after triumphing in intercampus heats hosted by NI's regional colleges.

The two students from NRC's Newtownabbey campus, Bailey and Jamie were among only four highly commended accolades awarded across all trades. Clifford Wharry, Jamie's tutor at NRC, said: "Jamie was only 17, and a first-year apprentice whenever he qualified for the NI competition, so for him to get to the national final I was over the moon and very proud.

"To hear he was highly commended gives us heart, and also gives Jamie motivation towards next year. He is a very good learner, and there are certainly bigger things to come for Bailey and Jamie."

Delivered by the **Construction Industry**

**Training Board**, the national final is part of the wider 2023 **WorldSkills** UK Finals.

The NI students scored higher than more than 1,000 entrants across the UK to earn their place at the event. The UK finals saw each apprentice compete against seven other highly skilled finalists in their respective categories in a series of complex challenges held over three days. Projects set by leading industry experts and judges test their knowledge, skills, and ability to work under pressure, all while adhering to health and safety protocols and having to impress with their talent and finesse.

Leo Murphy, Principal and CEO of North West Regional College and Chair of the College Principals' Group, said: "The skills these students will be demonstrating showcase both the vibrancy and breadth of learning and career opportunities now available through the further education sector here.

"They also underline the importance of a strong and supported FE sector in Northern Ireland in ensuring the achievement of the vision of a 10x economy."

Further information on the **WorldSkills** Finals is available at: [www.worldskillsuk.org](http://www.worldskillsuk.org)



Jacqui Hawthorne from Keady, who placed first in the Painting and Decorating category at **Skillbuild**.