

Glen Merchant

Skill: Landscape Gardening

From: West Sussex
Competed in: WorldSkills 2005, Helsinki

Qualifications

- 9 GCSE's
- Diploma in Tree Surgery
- NVQ level 2 in Hard Landscaping



Landscape Gardening was familiar to Glen Merchant as he had been pushing a wheelbarrow about from a young age. His father ran his own business working outside and Glen had helped out for as long as he can remember. Leaving school at 16, Glen embarked upon a national diploma in Tree Surgery before going on to do an NVQ level 2 in Hard Landscaping. Once fully qualified, Glen set up his own business in Landscaping and Tree Surgery.

How did he find out about competitions?

"It was while I was at Plumpton College that I first heard about competitions. They sounded like a bit of a laugh so me and my mate Andy decided to give it a go – Landscape Gardening is a team competition so you enter with someone. Competing turned out to be really good so we entered whenever we got the chance to see if we could better the last one."

And how did he get his place on the WorldSkills team?

"We won the national competition at Derby College and were then selected by UK Skills. Landscaping was a new competition to WorldSkills when we entered and there were relatively few competitors in this area when we started out so I think that we were really lucky."

So was the training for WorldSkills what he expected?

"Yes and no! The more we got into it, the more we realised how good it was, how much there was to be done and how privileged we were to have this opportunity. This made the all the evenings and weekends we had to spend training worth the effort and it was definitely an advantage having a team mate as we were able to encourage each other. There were also a few team-building weekends leading up to the competition where we got to get to know the rest of the team and learn about how to deal with stress and unexpected things. These weekends in themselves were brilliant and we got treated like kings as well as improving our skills"

How did you manage to maintain your business while training for the competition?

"It was hard going but my Dad helped me out loads by enabling me to combine my business with his. I did get fed up at times, working full time and then having to spend so much of my spare time preparing for the competition, but the nearer WorldSkills became the more it seemed worth it."

What was WorldSkills like?

"It was pretty amazing. You just don't realise until you go to a WorldSkills competition just how big it is and what a serious event it is. It's an understatement to say I enjoyed it – I loved every minute and would love to do it all again!"

Was there anything that was unexpected?

"I can honestly say I didn't expect it to be as grand and awe inspiring as it was. It totally blew us away and my only regret was not realising before quite how impressive it was going to be and how seriously the other competitors took the whole event. Competitions had always been more fun than anything else for me but WorldSkills is in a completely different league. I kept finding myself thinking, if only we'd learnt more about this or spent more time practising that, but I guess that's why hindsight is a great thing!"

What does he think are the benefits that taking part in WorldSkills has given him?

"It's given me loads of benefits! I've had a lot more training than many other people my age which is a great benefit now. Also we were lucky enough to get sponsored by Maquita Tools and part of their sponsorship meant that we could keep the tools after the competition which is another big bonus. The teambuilding training was another element of the whole experience which has had on-going benefits. I got to learn a lot about my strengths and weaknesses which has helped me to know where I need to concentrate to improve myself.

The fact that I took part in WorldSkills also led me to go on a work placement to Sydney, Australia – this was another amazing experience that I didn't want to end."

What was the best thing about WorldSkills?

"Being part of a fantastic team. Getting to know lots of different people from all walks of life is what I enjoyed most. We all bonded over this unique experience and became a really close, strong team. Although we got a lot of support from other people outside the competition, as a team we all knew what each other was going through and it was so different from anything else any of us had ever done, it really brought us together."

And life since the competition?

"I think I've been really lucky since WorldSkills. Within a year of returning from Finland I got the chance to work in Sydney for 6 weeks, thanks to an associated project of WorldSkills. Whilst I was there I also got to take part in the first ever WorldSkills Youth Forum in Melbourne, which involved ex-competitors from around the globe coming together to look at ways of improving the competition.

I was also very lucky that my Dad covered my business while I was away so I didn't lose any clients and although I would love to have stayed in Sydney, I didn't want to lose my business or let down my Dad! Since coming back from Sydney, I've built up my client base and now have 6 people working for me.

Touch wood the business is doing really well and I feel very fortunate that the phone keeps ringing – especially at the moment when a lot of people are finding it hard to get more work."

So what words of advice would Glen offer a future competitor?

"WorldSkills gives you a real opportunity so make sure you use it to your advantage.

Try to get as much practice as you possibly can. If there's any way you can go to an international competition before you take part in WorldSkills do so because it's a very different experience. If this isn't possible find out as much as you can and take it very seriously because it's an opportunity you'll never get again."

And finally, with WorldSkills London 2011 just a few years away, what do you think will be the benefits to young people?

"I think it will make more people aware of WorldSkills which sometimes feels like the world's best kept secret! For those people who take part it will change the way they go about their lives and for those who visit it will make them see that so much is possible."



For more information, please contact the PR Team, UK Skills: 020 7612 9260