



November 14, 2006

BCS nominees say their piece



Have just finished interviewing the shortlisted nominees for Young Practitioner of the Year at the British Computer Society's annual IT Professional Awards; four young pups living the IT dream. Covering skills, offshoring, training and career development issues regularly in these pages, it's good to get some anecdotal evidence from the horses' mouths especially from those keenly registering every detail of their (relatively) newly found careers.

And a fairly good cross-section it is too; one guy from Microsoft – well there had to be, didn't there – a helpdesk analyst from HR software specialist TeamSpirit Software, and two nominees from contact centre software provider Graham Technology, which must be doing something right. As you might expect, all had rather unusual reasons for getting into IT which make them more the exception than the rule, meaning it's difficult to use them as a vague yardstick with which to assess the industry. One had a hardware specialist for a dad, another's interest in computers stemmed in part from being blind. And most seemed to have had good support at an early age from their respective schools – food for thought for education tsars everywhere.

I also heard our nominees talk about the skills shortages they've seen first hand in their careers so far; a dearth of really quality candidates coming through from university that has certainly been apparent to IT watchers for years now. Another common thread was the double-edged sword of certifications; one nominee complained that course descriptions were poorly worded and significant extra study off-syllabus was needed to pass exams. Another said university course frustratingly lacked enough practical elements and although certs are a good indicator of formal training for recruiters, "many certifications are very costly and time-consuming". I'm not going to bate my news editor by lingering on this point, but, perhaps unsurprisingly given the dearth of potential candidates, there were no women shortlisted for the award.