MINISTERS AND MAJOR RETAILERS LAUNCH NATIONAL SKILLS ACADEMY FOR RETAIL

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The largest network of retail training centres in the UK will be unveiled today, with the nationwide launch of the National Skills Academy for Retail.

Lord Young, Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships, will join Theo Paphitis of Dragons’ Den, Mary ‘Queen of Shops’ Portas, Charlie Mayfield Chairman of John Lewis Partnership and Ian Cheshire CEO of Kingfisher Plc in London this evening to celebrate the launch of this exciting initiative.

It has been a turbulent year for the economy but the UK retail workforce continues to grow and is forecast to increase by six per cent between 2007 and 2017; 214,000 jobs will be created as a result of expansion and 1.2 million jobs will need to be filled as a result of people leaving the sector.¹

Lord Young said: "It is great to be opening the new National Skills Academy for Retail. Increasing skills in retail is vital to both the sector and the whole nation and I believe the National Skills Academy for Retail will set the benchmark for top-quality training across the country.

"Now is not the time to stop investing in skills. We know that employers who invest in skills now will be best placed to take advantage of the upturn when it comes."

Theo Paphitis, Chairman of Ryman Stationery and star of Dragons’ Den said: “I consider it an honour to be invited to talk at the launch of the National Skills Academy for Retail as Ryman employees are amongst the most experienced and best trained in the high street.

¹ Working Futures III, November 2008
“We are in the process of adjusting our very intensive ‘on the job’ training programme to be in line with the Skillsmart Retail Apprentice’s scheme. The National Skills Academy for Retail’s accredited skills shops will be able to help both employees and employers find the right training, whether it is an Apprenticeship scheme, retail customer service programme or work experience opportunity.”

The National Skills Academy for Retail is one of 16 skills academies in the National Skills Academy Network. All skills academies are employer-led, enabling them to develop targeted and relevant training for better skills that help industries grow.

Jane Rexworthy, Head of the National Skills Academy for Retail, said: "Not only will the National Skills Academy for Retail bring a step change in retail skills levels nationally, but every part of the country will create its own pool of work-ready, retail recruits who will easily slot into any retail business."

With £7 million of private sector investment, the Skills Academy for Retail will support people through learning over the first five years, offering high quality skills training to retailers and their employees throughout the UK.

The National Skills Academy for Retail is being backed by a number of well-known retailers including John Lewis Partnership, Marks & Spencer, Boots, Grosvenor and the British Council of Shopping Centres.

The skills academy will oversee the network of walk-in and web based retail skills shops on high streets and in shopping centres across the UK. It will be run by local stakeholders including developers, training providers, retailers, and Jobcentre Plus.

All the retail skills shops will become part of a network providing access to world-class skills and business support for retailers, employees and the future workforce, and will deliver a range of services to drive up the skills levels of everyone within the retail sector – including pre-employment training, Apprenticeships, retail customer service programmes and retail work experience opportunities.

For further information, interviews or photography please contact Savita Tailor at Hill & Knowlton on 0207 413 3728 or email savita.tailor@hillandknowlton.com.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The National Skills Academy network

National Skills Academies lead the way in the development of industry specific training that really delivers against business objectives. Each National Skills Academy puts employers at the heart of skills training for their sector; they influence the curriculum to ensure it reflects employers’ needs; get involved in the skills academy’s management; set standards; and influence strategic direction.

The National Skills Academy network was initiated by the Government to address the need for a world class workforce with better skills than ever before. It is managed by the Learning and Skills Council working in partnership with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the Skills for Business Network and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform.

The National Skills Academy for Retail

The National Skills Academy for Retail is the result of four years of planning, research and development. It is in its early days of formation with its first 18 retail skills shop members to be announced at the event. It will continue to build this network to around 70 retail skills shops to cover the whole of the UK over the next 5 years.

The 18 successful retail skills shops to become members are:

- Cheshire Oaks Retail Academy
- Derby Retail Skills Shop
- Devon Retail Skills
- Greater Birmingham Retail Skills Shop (Solihull)
- Hawk Retail Academy, London
- Heathrow Retail Academy
- Kings Lynn Retail Skills Shop
- The Lakeside Training Centre (Thurrock and Basildon)
- The Learning Shop, Bluewater (Kent)
- Leeds Retail Skills Academy
- Newcastle Skills Shop
- Preston Retail Skills Shop
- Retail Links, Hampshire Skills Shop (Basingstoke)
- Retail Skills Centre, Leicester
- Skillscentre: MK (Milton Keynes)
- The Source (Meadowhall, Sheffield)
- UK Career Centre, Manchester
- Wembley Skills Shop