The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has today given approval to £5 million for the funding for the new national centre of the National Skills Academy for Creative & Cultural Skills. The unique development will bring Further Education (FE) Colleges, private delivery partners and key employers in the industry together to develop and promote the skills and training for young people at the pre-employment stage, professional development for employees and freelancers already in the sector, and skills development for those requiring retraining and re-skilling as a consequence of the economic downturn.

The capital funding for the training academy, a new state-of-the-art building, will contribute to providing a training venue and administrative hub for the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills in Thurrock, Essex and will increase existing regional FE options by allowing a more dynamic range of practice across a broad spectrum of technical theatre, live music and events. Crucially, the National Skills Academy capital project has the support of the local South East Essex College and at national level, the Association of Colleges (AOC).

The National Skills Academy for Creative & Cultural Skills is one of thirteen National Academies supported by the LSC as part of the Specialisation agenda. Although still a relatively new organisation, the NSA has recruited 19 FE colleges as its Founder College network covering all regions of England. The Principals of the colleges are all closely involved in the development of the National Skills Academy. To date the National Skills Academy has 178 employers including all the national and regional theatres and live music venues.

The local community and the Thames Gateway will benefit significantly as the National Skills Academy is co-located with the Royal Opera House Production Park, which is an important element in the wider regional redevelopment activities. The Park brings together production, skills and training development, community access, and research and development. The training centre
will also be part of the wider regeneration strategy for the Thames Gateway bringing further benefits in an area of high deprivation and low educational attainment.

The LSC, in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, continues to provide focused investment for the development of specialist facilities which are critical for meeting employers’ skill needs and supporting the Government’s New Industry, New Jobs agenda.

Kevin Brennan MP, Minister for Further Education, Skills, Apprenticeships and Consumer Affairs said:

“Creative industries are increasingly important to the UK economy and the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills plays a vital role in supporting them and tackling skills shortages, especially in technical level skills.

“We’re really glad this new project in Thurrock has got the go-ahead today, providing opportunities for people to learn world-class skills in technical theatre and live music. It’s going ahead thanks to partnership working between a number of agencies including Government with support from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

“This is an important time to make vital investment in improving the skills of the workforce. That’s why we continue to help people access the training they need to get into and get on at work, and in turn make sure that key sectors such as the Creative and Cultural industries are best placed to win those jobs of the future.

“This Government continues to invest in National Skills Academies because we want to build a system which meets the needs of businesses and individuals and creates a world-beating workforce which will support the industry’s future development.”

Geoff Russell, Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council, said:

“I am delighted to welcome this important project which will bring a wide range of opportunities to help the economy prepare for the upturn by ensure we have the right skills and training in place to support the creative and cultural industries.
“As with other sectors, we are seeing that the skills academy programme is successful in bringing together employers and Government to provide the world class skills that our economy needs.”

Tom Bewick, Group Chief Executive, Creative & Cultural Skills said:

“The National Skills Academy is fundamentally important to a live performance sector that generates over £6 billion per year for the UK economy. It will provide world class training in the technical theatre and live music production industries. It will also enable young people to learn from industry professionals, from backstage theatre professionals to bands.

“The LSC will now work with the National Skills Academy to progress proposals for the innovative employer-designed training facility, which will be jointly funded in partnership with employers, training providers and other partners such as the Regional Development Agency and the Arts Council.”

Paul Latham, Chair, National Skills Academy for Creative & Cultural Skills - Chief Operating Officer, International Music said:

“I am delighted with the news of the £5million commitment from the LSC. This brings us a step closer to the build, of the Centre of excellence, in Thurrock and achieving the National Skills Academies vision of an internationally acclaimed technical theatre and live music sector supporting the best stages in the world.”

Andrea Stark, Executive Director, Arts Council England, East said:

“We are delighted with this commitment of £5 million from the Learning and Skills Council towards the National Skills Academy development in Thurrock, and look forward to reaching our fundraising targets within the next few months.”

Notes to Editors:

What are National Skills Academies?
National Skills Academies are specialist training organisations. They put employers at the heart of the skills system. They enable employers in a sector or an area of business such as enterprise, to act together to stimulate and set out employer demand and investment in skills. And they work with providers to deliver the right and best quality skills and training through tailored provision, including Apprenticeships and Train to Gain for their sector. National Skills Academies are managed by the Learning and Skills Council working in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, the Skills for Business Network, and the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

There are now 13 approved National Skills Academies in key sectors such as Construction, Engineering, Nuclear, Food manufacture, Financial Services, Hospitality, Retail, Sports and Leisure. Two more are in business planning.

Creative and Cultural Skills, Thurrock project

The building will be located in the Royal Opera House Production Park in Thurrock Essex, a unique development consisting of Grade II listed farm buildings, gardens and creative industries production facilities, and a major component of the wider economic and housing regeneration of the Thames Gateway. It will share the park with the new scenery fabrication facilities for the Royal Opera House. The building will expose learners to top level, world class technical theatre and live music professionals, companies and bands in a training environment, benefiting entry level, return learners and employees already in the work force to learn and develop skills for a career in the industry.

The location of the new building forms a key part of the widening participation strategy for the region, which is reflective of strategies in other centres of regeneration and growth, and will help to realise the aspiration to diversify the local economy and increase skills and attainment levels within the local workforce including through developing Further and Higher Education provision.

The National Skills Academy will allow the industry to ‘showcase’ equipment, trends and techniques in an environment that actively supports training engagement with these developments and foster closer industry and training links that will support the development of better practice in partnership with the FE sector, through lead colleges in all 9 regions in England. The new facilities will increase the existing regional FE options by allowing a more dynamic range
of practice across a broad spectrum of technical theatre, live music and events and will deliver partnership programmes being developed by the National Skills Academy and regional FE colleges such as South East Essex College, City College Norwich and the University of Creative Arts Rochester. The project will be an additional and complimentary asset within the region and will benefit Further and Higher education provision north and south of the river Thames across the three RDA regions having positive regional and national implications.

National Skills Academy is a key player in the Government's commitment to the cultural and heritage industries in England. The building will not only support initiatives to prepare for the economic upturn, but it will also be part of a future proof skills and training approach to ensuring the growth of the cultural industries.

The majority of the funding for this scheme will be provided by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), with significant contributions expected from The Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation (TTGDC), the Arts Council and creative industry employers trusts and foundations, East of England Development Agency (EEDA), Thurrock Council, Creative and Cultural Skills and Charitable trusts

**Thames Gateway**

The Thames Gateway is the United Kingdom's largest regeneration area. Across East London, South Essex and North Kent work is underway to support local businesses, attract investment, build infrastructure, and to strengthen and develop communities. The Thames Gateway is a strategically important economic location positioned between London and mainland Europe. We want to use this unique advantage so that the area can fulfil its potential and contribute to the nation's economic prosperity.

Government has been committed to the Thames Gateway programme for over five years. In 2003 the first dedicated funding programme was established to help accelerate regeneration in the Thames Gateway programme 1. Over the past two years a number of milestones have been reached which have enabled real progress in performance against Gateway objectives. Published in November 2007, the Thames Gateway Delivery Plan set out a clear way forward for the following three years structured around three driving forces for positive change in the Gateway:

- a strong economy
- improvements in the quality of life for local communities
- the development of the Gateway as an eco-region

**Funding**
Funding for this project has come from the LSC’s Capital Specialisation Fund which was announced last year. The Fund supports three types of capital projects to raise skills levels in key areas of the economy – National Skills Academies, Skills Capital Projects and Regional Skills Capital Development Projects. The projects are fine examples of how employers can directly influence the supply of training so that learners have the skills needed.

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