Employers urged to get involved with National Skills Academies as application deadline approaches

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London, 5 February 2007: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) with its partners, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), today urged employers to put forward their expressions of interest to develop a National Skills Academy for their industry, before the closing date of 5 March 2007.

The National Skills Academy network aims to drive up skills levels and productivity in England by delivering the skills required by each major sector of the economy. Lack of basic skills training is currently costing the UK economy more than £10 billion each year. Whilst it is one of the largest economies in the world, the UK’s prosperity and growth is being constrained by its low skills base. National Skills Academies aim to tackle this head on, putting employers at the heart of skills training in order to create a world-class workforce.

The Government plans to have 12 National Skills Academies up and running across England by 2008. So far, the Government has approved National Skills Academies for the Construction, Financial Services, Manufacturing, and Food and Drink Manufacturing industries. In October 2006, the second round of National Skills Academies were announced for the Nuclear, Process Industries, Creative and Cultural, and Hospitality sectors, which, if business plans are approved, will become operational later this year.

Expressions of interest from employers who would like to get involved in the National Skills Academies network must be lodged by 5 March 2007. Employers should contact their Sector Skills Council or the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) in the first
instance, to co-ordinate an expression of interest, after which a formal bidding process will commence. A prospectus for the third round of National Skills Academies, which are expected to open in 2008, is accessible online at www.nationalskillsacademy.co.uk.

Skills Minister, Phil Hope MP said:
"This prospectus sets out challenging criteria for National Skills Academies proposals to meet. We have set high standards but the prize is great and this flagship programme will play a key part in creating jobs, tackling skills shortages and driving up productivity.

"The Leitch Review of Skills recognises the role that the National Skills Academies will play in raising demand for skills from employers and learners. Employers have the critical role to play as sponsors, providing a clear vision, strong strategic leadership and funds for sustainable development."

Chris Banks, Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council said:

"It is a fact that having a motivated and skilled workforce improves the productivity of individuals and the performance of business overall. National Skills Academies put employers right at the heart of developing high-quality and relevant training programmes to improve the skills of the workforce for their own sector. The commitment of so many top employers to date has been impressive; this is because the National Skills Academies provide a golden opportunity for employers and Government to work together and build a Britain of enterprise and opportunity."

Employers who are already involved in the National Skills Academy network are extremely pleased with the results.

Stuart Bernau, Commercial and Communications Director, Nationwide Building Society, lauded the National Skills Academy for Financial Services:
“The National Skills Academy for Financial Services is a real opportunity for us as employers to be clear about the skills we need and confident that we will get them. It will create a wider pool of qualified recruits, ready to start work and hit the ground running.”

ENDS

Notes for editors
This press notice relates to England.

Learning and Skills Council:
The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

1. The National Skills Academy network was initiated by the Government to address the need for a world-class workforce and to offer employers a totally new method of influencing the types of training and method of delivery.

2. The National Skills Academy network builds on the success of the Pathfinder Fashion Retail Academy now open in London.

3. The National Skills Academies will be focussed on vocational education and skills training, delivering to young people (16-19 year olds) and adults and will be sector-based centres of excellence with national reach.

4. Two rounds of bids for National Skills Academies have so far been run - both starting with the publication of a prospectus inviting expressions of interest, and followed by a panel assessment for the most persuasive and promising proposals. The assessment panel has government officials from a range of departments and agencies, but is weighted towards its employer membership, and has an independent employer chair. The panel selects those bids which it feels are sufficiently strong to go into a full phase of business planning. That phase may take up to a year and involves all the detailed preparation required to turn the vision of the Academy into a reality that can start delivering the required training. There is a final assessment made at the end of the business planning stage to verify that each NSA has a realistic plan for successful operations.

5. Sector Skills Councils are employer-led strategic bodies set up by Government to help raise business performance, meet skills needs and shape relevant learning supply within a given sector of the economy. Each one represents a sector with a workforce of at least
500,000. There are now 25 Sector Skills Councils covering around 85% of the UK workforce. They have a key role in National Skills Academies in pulling together bids and business plans, co-ordinating employer sponsorship, and working on curriculum content and liaison with learning providers.

6. National Skills Academies aim to:
   - deliver high-quality training;
   - provide first class teaching in a modern learning environment;
   - be centres of innovation and creativity, developing and re-shaping training programmes to meet the sectors’ needs;
   - be flexible, sustaining the closest possible relationships with employers of all sizes;
   - build specialist networks with a range of other learning providers, so that new thinking, new methods and higher standards are not limited to single organisations, but work to the benefit of learners and employers across the training and skills sector.

This initiative is being driven by well-known companies in each industry. Names such as Bovis Lend Lease, Kier Homes, Northern Foods plc, Youngs Bluecrest Seafood Ltd, Filtronic plc, Caterpillar, Nationwide Building Society and Norwich Union Insurance have committed to leading the successful bids.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

All employer enquiries regarding National Skills Academies visit:
http://www.nationalskillsacademy.co.uk

All public enquiries please contact:
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