Today almost 200,000 workers are set to benefit from training as eleven top firms make the Skills Pledge.

Phones4u, Network Rail, BUPA, British Gas and others will commit to support all employees to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills and work towards their first Level 2 qualification – the equivalent of five good GCSEs – in the areas relevant to their business.

Business leaders of the organisations will formally make the Skills Pledge at the ‘National employers, national solutions’ conference, convened by the National Employer Service in Whitehall, exploring how large employers can engage with and contribute to the Government’s strategy for young people, children and families.

Tom Shorten, operations director, Phones 4u, said: “It’s without question or hesitation that we consider skills a number one priority and this is why I am making the Skills Pledge on behalf of Phones 4u today. If anything, current market conditions make it even more important for all our staff to be the best they can be. We know from experience that a better skilled workforce drives a more successful business.”

Skills Minister Lord Young said: “We have consistently said that now is not the time to cut back on skills and training, a view supported by the CBI, TUC and increasingly leading employers.

“I want to congratulate the employers who are making the Skills Pledge today; it’s great to see them making a commitment to the skills and training needs of their staff which will help them prepare for the upturn when it comes.

“The Government is investing nearly £4 billion in adult skills and training this year so that businesses and individuals get access to real help now. And we have made Train to Gain more flexible so that many more businesses can benefit from Government investment totalling £1bn by 2010/11.”

Lord Young will be joined by Justin King, Chief Executive of Sainsbury’s, John Cridland, Deputy Director-General of the CBI and Chris Banks, Chair of the Learning and Skills Council, to discuss the importance of investing in skills.
Chris Banks, Chair of the Learning and Skills Council and host of the event, said: “It is more important than ever to invest in your people during an economic downturn. Organisations that continue to invest in the skills of their staff in a recession are 2.5 times less likely to fail than those that don’t. The evidence is clear: improving skills improves productivity.1

“We commend those businesses which have made the Skills Pledge and encourage other organisations to follow this lead.”

Ken McCall, CEO of DHL UK & Ireland said: “Though it’s early days, we’ve already seen benefits of the programme across the DHL business. After making the Skills Pledge in November last year, we’ve received extremely positive feedback from the employees. 200 of our staff have begun or completed training with plans for another 600 to be trained over the next year. Employees and managers alike have really welcomed the opportunity to do a qualification that links to the existing training needs of their job, and we have now incorporated NVQ Level 2 customer service training into our six-month review period for all new customer service agents.”

The Leitch Review of Skills, published in December 2006, warned that the UK must ‘raise its game’ on skills at all levels if it is to sustain and improve its position in the global economy. The Skills Pledge fulfils a key recommendation made in the review and so far over 10,000 businesses have made the public commitment covering 5.4 million employees.

Employers who make the Skills Pledge can also access support for their training needs through the Government’s Train to Gain service, which has just announced that small and medium sized businesses will be top priority for Tran to Gain funds including the £350 million growth over the next two years.

The measures include free and part-funded bite-size training courses in areas that make quick returns to a business, whether it’s in cash flow management or business improvement techniques. The Train to Gain leadership and management programme was also extended so businesses with between five and 250 employees can access up to £1,000 in funding in areas such as coaching and mentoring or working towards a qualification.

Companies making the Skills Pledge on 29 January 2009 include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Number of employees covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Gas Services Limited</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bupa Care Homes (CFH Care) Ltd</td>
<td>26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceva Logistics Limited</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craegmoor Healthcare</td>
<td>6,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gist Limited</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Research carried out by the University of Kent in 2007 funded by the Sector Skills Development Agency.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISS UK</td>
<td>43,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nestor Healthcare Group Plc</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Rail Infrastructure Limited</td>
<td>33,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phones 4u</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw (Group) Ltd</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Capita Group</td>
<td>27,800</td>
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</tbody>
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For more information on the Skills Pledge, please visit traintogain.gov.uk/skillspledge or call 0800 015 55 45

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Media enquiries

For further information, case studies or photography, please contact:

- Natasha Groocock, Learning and Skills Council: Tel. 024 76 82 3640 natasha.groocock@lsc.gov.uk
- San Jutla, Learning and Skills Council: Tel. 024 76 82 3640 san.jutla@lsc.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

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.

Skills Pledge
Officially launched by the Government on 14 June 2007, the aim of the Skills Pledge is to ensure all staff are skilled, competent, and able to fully contribute in the workplace.

Led by the Learning and Skills Council, the Skills Pledge is a public commitment by an employer to invest in skills. Part of its role is to improve basic skills in literacy and numeracy - as well as helping employees work towards relevant qualifications to at least Level 2 (the equivalent of five good GCSEs). To date, more than 6,000 companies have made the Skills Pledge.

National Employer Service
The National Employer Service (NES) provides the UK’s leading employers with direct funding and impartial, specialist advice on workforce development linked to recognised qualifications.

About Phones 4u
Phones 4u is an independent mobile retailer, offering all networks and handset manufacturers’ products. It is part of the Staffordshire-based 4u Group, and the Group CEO is Tim Whiting. Leading the way in the mobile industry through its excellent customer service, award-winning advertising and differentiated in-store experience, Phones 4u has over 450 stores and is still rapidly growing. Phones 4u employs circa 6,000 people.

In 2008, Phones 4u won the Mobile industry award for Best Retailer in the UK and came top in Harding and Yorke’s 2008 ERIC Customer Empathy Rating Index after it was recognised among the mobile industry players as demonstrating the most empathy and understanding towards its customers. It also ranked highly in...
the Harding and Yorke CXI League (Customer Experience Index) in December, which ranked in order the top 10 customer experiences across all industries of 2008. Phones 4u came in at 8th position and was the only mobile retailer to make it into the top 10.

Phones 4u recognises that buying a new phone can be a complex and confusing affair. Phones 4u cuts through this confusion with its unique consumer consultation process, resulting in accurate, impartial advice and a package that is right for each customer. As a result it sells more new contracts than anyone else on the High Street. www.phones4u.co.uk

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