Skills Minister, Phil Hope MP today announced the approval of a National Skills Academy for Food and Drink Manufacturing. This is a joint venture between Government and the industry to address the skill-needs of this important sector of the UK economy.

The National Skills Academy for Food and Drink Manufacturing will open in April 2007 and is forecast to provide vocational education and training for at least 28,000 employees during its first four years, addressing the specific needs of the industry and those who work in it. The Food and Drink Academy is a joint venture between Improve (the Sector Skills Council for the Sector) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which exists to make England better skilled and more competitive.

The training will be delivered through a network of approved Academy Training Centres, each contributing by its particular specialist area of expertise. The first five are: Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (fish processing); University of Lincoln Holbeach Campus (FMCG); Poultec Training, Dereham in Norfolk (meat and poultry); Reaseheath College in Nantwich (dairy); and Johnson Diversey in Northampton (food hygiene). More, with similar levels of expertise, will be added as the Academy expands.
"I am delighted that the Food and Drink Manufacturing sector is now represented in the growing network of National Skills Academies," said Skills Minister, Phil Hope MP. "It is vital that we continue to improve our capacity for learning by driving up standards and specialisation if we are to compete successfully in the global market. We want to achieve our aim of up to 12 academies operational by 2008 and that is why we announced earlier this month that employers are now invited to bid to be part of the next round of National Skills Academies."

As well as Food and Drink Manufacturing, the Government has approved National Skills Academies for the Construction, Financial Services and Manufacturing industries. Bids from the nuclear industry; the chemical industry; the hospitality sector and the creative and cultural industries have been accepted by the Government and have been invited to prepare business plans ready for the next stage of the process.

Jaine Clarke, the LSC’s Director of Skills for Employers said:
“Each National Skills Academy represents a major commitment by Government in the future skill needs of the economy. We are proud to have worked with Improve – the Sector Skills Council for Food and Drink Manufacturing – to deliver this important initiative. Employer commitment and sponsorship is key to the success of National Skills Academies and the benefits for UK employers are far reaching. This is why companies such as Big Bear, Warburton’s, Nestle UK and RHM have worked with Improve to create the National Skills Academy for Food and Drink Manufacturing. They believe that a highly trained and motivated workforce delivers improvements to productivity and performance.”

Paul Wilkinson, Chair of Improve and two major food manufacturers (Big Bear and Produce World) said: “This is a major new landmark in the training provision for food and drink manufacturers. The National Skills Academy has been driven by
employers’ needs, has been designed by employers, and will be run by employers."

Employers are at the heart of the development of all National Skills Academies, giving them a real say in how they are run, including:

- influencing the curriculum to ensure it reflects their needs;
- setting standards;
- determining what network of providers they want to work with;
- getting involved in the management of the academies; and,
- shaping their strategic direction.

They will also part fund the National Skills Academies providing capital investment as well as equipment, know-how and industry insight. Employer sponsorship will fund about 50% of the capital costs of a National Skills Academy with about 35% coming from the Government and the remainder from other sources such as European funding.

-ENDS-

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.

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

2. The NSA 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 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 real life entity 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. The third round prospectus can be found at www.nationalskillsacademy.co.uk and the deadline for lodging expressions of interest is 5 March 2007. Employers should contact their Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) 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.

6. Sector Skills Councils are employer-led strategic bodies set up by Government to help raise business performance, meet skill 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.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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