The search for the nation’s top Apprenticeship employers is in full swing but the deadline for entries is fast approaching.

Now in their sixth year, the Learning and Skills Council’s (LSC) national Apprenticeship Awards are designed to recognise employers who are successfully using Apprenticeships to improve business performance and the key role apprentices play in today’s world. The awards celebrate the achievements of employers of all sizes, from all sectors of industry.

This is a fantastic opportunity to stand out from the crowd – winners will be announced at a prestigious national awards ceremony at the Old Billingsgate, Central London on 16 July. This is set to be the best awards to date and the LSC is calling for more entries before the deadline on 27 February. This falls during Apprenticeship Week, which will highlight the benefits of Apprenticeships and encourage more employers to get on board – what better time to get involved yourself?

The Awards demonstrate the popularity of Apprenticeships amongst employers in all industries and of all sizes, previous winners have included businesses as diverse as a ship builder, a nursery, an IT firm and a veterinary practice.

Talking about their Apprenticeship programme, Jill Carr, Training Manager, at Large Employer Winner 2008, Pendennis Yacht Building, says: “One of the main benefits of our Apprenticeship scheme is that the apprentices inject skills, youth, longevity, and flexibility into our niche business. Apprenticeships help us to mould employees, through training and on the job experience, thus providing us with the right level of skills and discipline. To get the best people you need the best training and that’s what we do.”

Chris Banks, Chair of the Learning and Skills Council said: “In the current economic climate, it is crucial to recognise the importance of training programmes such as Apprenticeships. “These awards offer companies a fantastic opportunity to demonstrate the business benefits of employing apprentices. Entries to the Awards have increased year on year and we have received well over 4,000 entries since the first Apprenticeship Awards in 2004.”

Employers are eligible to enter for one of five categories depending on their company size; Micro (1-9 employees), Small (10-49 employees), Medium (50-249 employees), Large (250-4,999 employees) and the new Macro size category that will cover businesses with over 5,000 employees – levelling the playing field for businesses of all sizes. They are assessed on a number of criteria including implementation of the Apprenticeship programme, clear demonstration of the way Apprenticeships have benefited their business and the level of support provided to their apprentices.

In addition to the Employer Awards, companies can encourage their apprentices to enter the awards too. There are three categories open to apprentices - Apprentice of the Year, Advanced Apprentice of the Year and Young Apprentice of the Year. The Awards’ Premier Sponsor for the fifth consecutive year is City & Guilds.
To enter the Awards, or for more information, visit apprenticeships.org.uk/awards or call 0800 954 8896. Deadline for entries is 27 February 2009. Regional Apprenticeship Awards category winners will automatically be entered into the national Apprenticeship Awards.

- Ends -

Notes to editors

The new Apprenticeships campaign has kicked off with the launch of this year’s Apprenticeship Awards, closely followed by the launch of a new Apprenticeships advert and seminar series with Alan Sugar and a concentration of activity around Apprenticeship Week (23 – 27th February). The campaign highlights the benefits of Apprenticeships and, as more companies realise their potential Train to Gain skills brokers can advise businesses on their funding eligibility.

Around 200,000 apprentices start each year and more than 110,000 individuals completed their Apprenticeships in 2007. Over 130,000 businesses in England offer Apprenticeships.

Winners in the employer categories are announced as follows:

- Large Employer of the Year (250+ employees) - Pendennis Shipyard, Super-Yacht builders based in Falmouth, Cornwall
- Medium Employer of the Year (50 – 249 employees) - Mark Wilkinson Furniture, based in Bromham, Wiltshire
- Small Employer of the Year (10 – 49 employees) - Arcana Hair and Beauty, based in Milton Keynes
- Micro Employer of the Year (1 – 9 employees) - Kingscliffe Day Nursery, based in Loughborough, Leicestershire

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.

Press Enquiries:

Please contact: Natasha Groocock, National Press Manager, 02476 82 3640 natasha.groocock@lsc.gov.uk
San Jutla, Nation Press Officer, 02476 82 5793 san.jutla2@lsc.gov.uk