Veolia Environnement was named Employer of the Year at the 2008 National Employer Service (NES) Learners First Awards at Alton Towers last night.

Veolia was singled out for its contribution to workplace learning, beating off fierce competition from the other finalist employers, who included TUI Travel and the Royal Navy. Veolia’s commitment to training involves the introduction of a state of the art training centre, Campus Veolia, as well as a programme ensuring that every employee had the possibility of achieving at least a NVQ Level 2. To date, achievements include a number of Train to Gain completions and the introduction of Apprenticeships in 2007.

The event was hosted by former British Champion hurdler Colin Jackson. Colin said: “I know from my own experience that the sheer desire and effort made to constantly improve your performance is pivotal to success. The winners and finalists have clearly demonstrated this, so it has been a privilege to be able to pay tribute to their outstanding achievements.”

The NES, part of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), supports large, national multi-site employers to offer a range of accredited, in-house, work-based learning programmes to their employees. These include Skills for Life and NVQs at Level 2 and 3 (Train to Gain) and Apprenticeships.

There were six competition categories this year with one winner in each; five for individual learners and one for employers.

- Apprenticeship Awards (sponsored by the Employability and Skills Group)
- Advanced Apprenticeship Award (sponsored by the Whitbread Group plc)
- Train to Gain (sponsored by Center Parcs)
- Skills for Life Award (sponsored by Sainsburys)
- Personal Achievement Award (sponsored by Tesco)
- Employer of the Year Award (sponsored by City & Guilds)
The Learners First Awards recognise the achievements of individuals employed by large (5000+ employees) businesses who hold training contracts with NES. These learners have excelled in their work-based learning programmes, and many of them have overcome significant challenges to do so. The awards also recognise the achievements of their employers who, by making and fulfilling their Skills Pledge and supporting their employees, have demonstrated their commitment to skills development in their workplace.

Hilary Chadwick, Director of the NES, said: “All the winners demonstrate the significant returns that can be gained by individuals and companies who invest in learning to meet new challenges. I want to congratulate the employers who have designed and delivered excellent in-house programmes to improve their business performance.”

Chris Banks, Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council who presented the Employer of the Year Award said, “We were delighted to see so many strong candidates in the finals of this year’s NES Learners First Awards. This is a reflection of the strong commitment employers like Veolia have made to investing in learning and skills in the workplace. Clearly this is essential to both the success of businesses as well as the personal development of individual staff.”

Five further award winners were announced last night:

Rachael Hoyle - Advanced Apprenticeship (sponsored by the Whitbread Group plc)
Ashley Rowe - Apprenticeship Awards (sponsored by the Employability and Skills Group)
Colin Hamilton - Personal Achievement Award (sponsored by Tesco)
Glennys Finney - Skills for Life Award (sponsored by Sainsbury’s)
Stuart Borowik - Train to Gain (sponsored by Center Parcs)

The Employer of the Year category was sponsored by City & Guilds.

- ENDS -

For further media information and photography please contact:

Hill & Knowlton

Sandhya Shyam
0207 973 4446
Sandhya.Shyam@hillandknowlton.com

Notes to editors:

The National Employer Service (NES) supports employers with more than 5000 employees to make and fulfill their Skills Pledge, and to offer nationally accredited inhouse training to their people. The team also manages the performance of work-place learning contracts with the LSC’s largest national training providers. NES contracts with more than
80 large employers, and 1 in 5 Apprenticeships and 1 in 10 Train to Gain learners are supported by NES funding agreements.

**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 Campaign:**
In July 2007, the LSC and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) launched the skills campaign. The campaign - Our future. It's in our hands - urges people to take control of their future by investing in skills. It is the most ambitious marketing and communications campaign of its kind and over a three to five year period aims to bring about the cultural change needed to improve the attitudes and aspirations of employers and individuals to learning and skills across England.

**The 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 work place. Led by the Learning and Skills Council, the Skills Pledge is a voluntary public commitment by the leadership of a company or organisation to support all employees gain skills for personal growth and enhance business productivity. Essential to the Skills Pledge is the achievement of 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).