

Kriss Akabusi in relay race to encourage businesses in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to sign the Skills Pledge

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Former three-time Olympic medallist Kriss Akabusi MBE was in Luton yesterday to mark the end of the first leg of a relay race to encourage employers in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to publicly pledge their commitment to raising the skills of their employees. The Skills Pledge Relay Race was launched last week in Essex by MP Barbara Follett and the baton will now make its way around the East of England to highlight the importance of employee training and improving the skills of the region.

Businesses and employers who have signed the Skills Pledge also attended the event at Luton Hoo and were presented with a certificate by Kriss Akabusi in recognition of the investment they have made in their employees to gain skills and qualifications to do their jobs and meet the needs of the business. Kriss said: "Each and every one of us has potential. Sometimes it takes others to recognise this and believe in us in order that we can realise our true worth. I'm delighted that so many organisations – both large and small – are signing up to the Skills Pledge. Not only are they publicly supporting their employees and assisting them to gain valuable skills, they are also increasing their organisations productivity and helping to realise many champions. The race is now on for other organisations to make this commitment and release the potential within their business. Dream big!"

Now one year old, the Skills Pledge was launched in 2007 by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to encourage employers to make a public and voluntary commitment to actively support employees in learning and developing their skills.

Graham Moores, Economic Development Director for the Learning and Skills Council covering Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, welcomed the employers and thanked them for making the Skills Pledge. He then passed the baton to Kriss in preparation to hand over to the employers and said: "The idea of linking the Skills Pledge and passing on the baton is to have organisations that have made the Pledge hand the baton onto someone who hasn't signed. It is about passing on the message on how important it is to make a commitment to train your staff and the difference that trained staff make to the success of the business.

"All of the businesses here today understand the importance of a trained work force and I'd like to ask them all to encourage other business leaders in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire to make the Pledge. And to pass the message to their supply chain, members of networking groups and friends."

To mark the start of the second leg of the relay race representatives from the following businesses were presented with their Skills Pledge certificates and will pass the baton onto businesses in the Eastern Region who have not yet signed the Pledge:

- 3M United Kingdom PLC
- Barnfield College
- Bedford College
- Bedfordshire Police
- Beds & Luton Chamber of Commerce
- Bedfordshire & Luton Fire & Rescue Service
- Carpentry Management Contracting (Beds)

- EEBC (East of England Brokerage Consultancy)
- Herts Chamber of Commerce
- Luton Borough Council
- North Herts College
- Oaklands College (Herts)
- Protech Training Services (Beds)
- The Learning Partnership – Beds and Luton
- TCHC (The Consultancy Home Counties Ltd)
- West Herts College

As she accepted the baton, Rachel May, Head of Employer Responsiveness at West Herts College, said: “As a training provider, West Herts College has been involved in the LSC’s Train to Gain initiative from the beginning, working with a wide range of local companies to ensure they have a skilled workforce in order to make their business a success.

“As an employer of a large number of people from the local community the College was delighted to sign the Skills Pledge in January in order to ensure our own staff are fully skilled and able to make a full contribution to the success of the College.

“We would encourage as many businesses as possible to sign up to the Skills Pledge, and reap the benefits and support that the Pledge provides.”

The Skills Pledge baton will now continue to make its way around the region where it will be passed to other employers signing the Skills Pledge.

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**For more media information please call Dawn Humphreys or Louise Betts at
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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 – Q&A:

Q1. What is the Skills Pledge?

A voluntary, public commitment made by employers to increase the skills of their workforce by supporting employees in improving their skills, gaining qualifications and realising their potential.

The wording of the Skills Pledge is:

On behalf of [*Company name*] I [*insert name*] am making a commitment that we shall:

- Actively encourage and support our employees to gain the skills and qualifications that will meet the needs of our business and will support their future employability
- Further support our employees to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills and work towards their first full Level 2 qualification
- Demonstrably raise our employee's skills and competencies to improve our organisational performance through investing in economically valuable training and development

Q2. Who can make the Skills Pledge?

Any organisation can make the Skills Pledge. One person should make the pledge on behalf of the organisation for example the chief executive or owner.

Q3. What are the benefits of making the Skills Pledge?

Organisations can benefit from making the Skills Pledge by:

- The chance to help employees develop and achieve valuable qualifications
- A boost in the productivity, capability and happiness of employees
- An increase in employee confidence and motivation
- The opportunity to publicly prove the organisation's commitment to skills
- Improvement in staff retention – leading to a reduction in recruitment costs
- Skilled staff to contribute to business success

- Access to expert training advice and Government support (see Question 5)

Q4. How do companies fulfil the Skills Pledge?

The Skills Pledge is entirely voluntary and companies are able to choose how they fulfil the commitment. Companies are free to use their own methods or they can use the support available to them via Train to Gain, Apprenticeships and other Government services.

Q5. What support is available to companies who make the Skills Pledge?

As a result of making the Skills Pledge companies can choose to receive professional, impartial advice tailored to their business from Train to Gain. Train to Gain Skills Brokers can help companies identify training needs - from basic skills to high-level specialist training. The brokers can help companies find the right courses and training providers and organise a schedule which suits the organisation.

However, there is no requirement for companies to contact a skills broker at any stage. If a company knows what training it wants to provide and is happy to organise it this is still recognised as fulfilling the Skills Pledge.

Q6. Is there funding available to help companies fulfil the Skills Pledge?

Companies will be expected to make some investment but may not have to bear the full cost of training themselves. Skills Brokers can help find available funding. For instance, funding is available for every adult to gain basic numeracy and literacy skills and work towards their first Level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs). There are Level 2 courses relevant to all business types.

Q7. How do organisations make the Skills Pledge?

Making the Skills Pledge is a simple four-step process:

- Register and make a statement of commitment
- Provide details about the company and training in place/required
- Create an action plan based on these details
- Start training

Companies can complete this process independently online at www.lsc.gov.uk/skillspledge or they can chose to contact a Skills Broker on 0800 015 55 45 for guidance and advice on training needs and producing an action plan.

Q8. Where is there more information about the Skills Pledge?

More information about the Skills Pledge can be found online at www.lsc.gov.uk/skillspledge