

MP Barbara Follett launches relay race to encourage businesses in the East of England to make the Skills Pledge

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Barbara Follett, Minister for the East of England, has challenged businesses in the eastern region to publicly pledge their commitment to employee training and increasing the skills of the region by taking part in a Skills Pledge Relay Race around the East of England.

MP Barbara Follett launched the relay on Monday (June 16th) at a conference in Thurrock, Essex where she met with chief executives of local authorities across the eastern region to discuss the skills agenda. To mark the start of the relay race Barbara Follett presented the Skills Pledge baton to representatives from Cambridgeshire County Council, Essex County Council, Luton Borough Council, Suffolk County Council and Thurrock Council – five local authorities which have already made the Skills Pledge.

To start the relay Councillor Stephen Castle from Essex County Council accepted the Skills Pledge baton from the MP on behalf of all the local authorities at the launch. The baton will now be passed from businesses that have already made the pledge to those which have recently signed or are ready to sign at a series of Skills Pledge relay events held across the region throughout June and July.

Barbara Follett, Minister for the East of England, said: "I am delighted to launch the Skills Pledge relay in the East of England. We need many more organisations to follow the example set by these local authorities if we are to equip our Region with the skills it needs to compete in today's global markets. The Skills Pledge signals employers' understanding of the value of knowledge to their businesses and to their employees. That is why I hope that this baton will be passed on to many different organisations throughout our Region during the race to get employers to publicly commit to support their workers in improving their skills and gaining qualifications."

As he accepted the baton Cllr Stephen Castle, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Regeneration and the 2012 Games at Essex County Council, said: "I was very pleased to receive the Skills Pledge baton on behalf of local authorities, and start the relay race across the region. Staff training is something we take very seriously at Essex County Council, as it is important for us to support employees in developing new skills and achieving their potential. This will help us to continue to improve the services we provide, and enhance our residents' quality of life. I look forward to passing the baton to other organisations in the region."

The Skills Pledge, an initiative led by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), is designed to encourage employers to make a public and voluntary commitment to actively support all employees in learning and developing their skills. By making the Skills Pledge employers are provided with free professional training advice tailored to the business and access to services such as Train the Gain and Apprenticeships to help facilitate the commitment they have made to workforce training.

Caroline Neville, Regional Director for the LSC East of England, said: "It is great that so many local authorities in our region have signed the Skills Pledge and are

here today. Their commitment to support employees in gaining valuable skills is an example for other organisations to take the baton and join the race to sign the Skills Pledge”.

The launch of the relay even resulted in another organisation making the pledge on the day. Gary Sullivan, Managing Director of Essex-based construction and logistics company Wilson James, decided to make the public commitment at the event. As a result Mr Sullivan was invited to join the local authority representatives in accepting the Skills Pledge baton.

Mr Sullivan said: “We put training at the heart of our business and everything we do. Our business is very successful and a lot of that success can be attributed to our staff and their knowledge and expertise. I decided to make the pledge on the day not only to reinforce the company’s already strong commitment to training but also so I could pass the baton on to other organisations and highlight the message that employee training is an excellent way to improve your business.”

The relay launch also served as an opportunity for other organisations which had already made the Skills Pledge but had not yet been presented with their official certificate to be awarded them by MP Barbara Follett. Skills Pledge certificates were presented to Suffolk County Council, Essex County Council, Peterborough City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and Wilson James.*

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**For more media information please call Dawn Humphreys or Louise Betts at
Tribe on 01603 417722 or email dawn@tribepr.com**

Images

Digital image attached:

- **Relay Launch 1:** (L to R) Rosalind Turner of Suffolk County Council, Gary Sullivan of Wilson James, Angie Ridgwell of Thurrock Council, Kevin Crompton of Luton Borough Council, Barbara Follett MP, Cllr Stephen Castle of Essex County Council, Mark Lloyd of Cambridgeshire County Council and Richard Puleston of Essex County Council.

*To request pictures of Suffolk County Council, Essex County Council, Peterborough City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council or Wilson James being presented with Skills Pledge certificates by Barbara Follett MP

Or

Barbara Follett MP passing the Skills Pledge baton to Cllr Stephen Castle of Essex County Council

Call Dawn Humphreys on 01603 417722 or email dawn@tribepr.com

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.

The Skills Pledge:

The Skills Pledge is a voluntary, public commitment by the leadership of a company or organisation to support all its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2 (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs). The purpose is to ensure that all staff are skilled, competent and able to make a full contribution to the success of the company/organisation.

The Pledge can be given by the Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer, owner/manager or other Board member, on behalf of the organisation. It is a corporate commitment covering the whole company/organisation. For those employees who do not already have full Level 2 qualification, the Government will provide funding to help them gain basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as their first full Level 2 qualification.

The Skills Pledge is open to all employers of all sizes in the private, public and voluntary sectors.