

Norfolk Skills Conference places skills at top of Norfolk's agenda

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Over two hundred Norfolk business leaders joined forces in Norwich on Wednesday 20 February to place training and skills at the top of the county's agenda.

The Norfolk Skills Conference, organised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, in association with Shaping Norfolk's Future hosted the day long conference at the De Vere Dunston Hall Hotel, near Norwich.

Delegates including bosses of top local companies, government decision-makers, entrepreneurs and experts from education and training heard presentations by Professor Mike Campbell from the Sector Skills Development Agency, Sally Low from British Chambers of Commerce and Dick Palmer from City College Norwich.

Real life case studies were presented by four Norfolk businesses: Reef One, Lotus Cars, Cooper Roller Bearings and Turton Middleton, who have successfully accessed training and skills support, invested in their staff and experienced wide ranging business benefits as a result.

Following this was a round table discussion on how Norfolk can rise to the challenge to increase skills levels in Norfolk. Delegates were asked 'What needs to be done to drive up skills levels in Norfolk?' and then discussed different ways this could be addressed. The answers were collated and will inform the next steps taken by the LSC and the

Chamber to address the challenges. Two possibilities raised were the development of a 'skills map' of Norfolk and the creation of 'skills ambassadors' to raise the profile of the issue with wider audiences.

Graham Brough, Area Director LSC Norfolk said: "The point of today has been to reinforce the importance of this being a partnership challenge. Norfolk currently lags behind in the skills we have in our workforce. Employers, colleges and training providers, economic regeneration projects, the Chamber and the LSC must work together to turn this around.

"We need to develop a skills route map for Norfolk to help us achieve our ambitions. We want Norfolk to become famous for its skills."

The key driver for the event was the Leitch Report. Published in December 2006, the report – Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills – examines the UK's long-term skills needs and sets out ambitious goals for 2020 to help make it a world leader*. The Conference allowed delegates to understand what the report means for Norfolk and demonstrated that training provision is accessible for local companies, especially small and medium enterprises.

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Notes to Editors

*The Leitch Report goals include increasing the number of adults achieving basic skills of literacy and numeracy; boosting the number of apprentices to 500,000 a year; and ensuring more than 40 per cent of adults are qualified to Level 4 and above, up from 29 per cent in 2005, with a commitment to even higher figures.

The 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 LSC in Norfolk

LSC Norfolk works with employers, young people, adults and a wide range of partners and stakeholders with the aim of improving learning and skills in the county.

Last year, the number of young people remaining in learning at 16 in Norfolk increased to its highest ever level of 17,319, and there was a further 3,000 apprentices.

Around 40,000 adults undertook a learning programme - with a large proportion undertaking accredited, vocational programmes. In addition, there are now 3,600 employees in Norfolk being supported to develop their skills through Train to Gain.

We will invest £18,200,000 in learning and skills in Norfolk in 2007/08, with a significant portion of this funding used to help employers develop skills for productivity and compe