

## **North West to benefit from launch of first three National Skills Academies**

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The North West is one of the first regions in England set to significantly benefit from the recent launch of the first three National Skills Academies.

The National Skills Academy programme, delivered through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) working with employers and their Sector Skills Councils, aims to drive up the standard of industry training, improve productivity and tackle skills shortages across England.

The academies that have been approved and will shortly become operational are:

**Financial Services Skills Academy** – the academy will offer centres of excellence in skills training and development for the financial services industry, from entry level to retraining and continuing professional development. One of only four initial regional centres is to be based in Manchester with high quality providers identified as delivery spokes, including the Financial Management Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) at Oldham College.

**National Manufacturing Skills Academy (NMSA)** – the academy will focus on meeting the skills needs of both large and small employers from the manufacturing sector including aerospace, automotive, electronics and marine. The NMSA will work as a hub and spoke model, with the spokes at the heart of regional skills activity managing relationships with employers and individuals, regional stakeholders and the provider network. The academy will launch its third spoke in the North West in early 2007.

The employer led NMSA will work with a number of stakeholders including Government departments, employers' organisations, learning & skills providers, Sector Skills Councils, LSC, Regional Development Agencies, Jobcentre Plus and Higher Education Institutes.

**Construction Skills Academy** – the main focus of the academy is to provide a range of learning and development opportunities for people that are centred on large scale construction projects. One central hub and nine regional partnerships will be developed comprising of employers representatives, key training providers, colleges, the Regional Development Agency, regional LSC, regional ConstructionSkills, Jobcentre Plus and other stakeholders as required. The regional partnership will provide support to each of the major projects within its region. The North West has already been identified as one of two initial regional partnerships to be established during the development phase of the plan. Key projects will include New Heartlands in Liverpool, New East Manchester and Balfour Beatty in Manchester and Elevate in East Lancashire.

John Korzeniewski, Regional Director of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) North West said,

“This is excellent news for both learners and employers in the North West and I am delighted that the region features so prominently in the launch of the first National Skills Academies.

“Whilst there is evidence that the skills gap in the region is closing, there is still much to be done. The National Skills Academies will go a long way to address these skills gaps by ensuring that employers are at the heart of the development of the programme.”

The launch marks the start of an employer-led, world-class National Skills Academy network to provide vocational education and training for school leavers and adults, tailor made to meet the specific needs of industry sectors and those who work in them. A fourth academy, representing the Food and Drink sector is close to being approved and bids from the nuclear industry, the chemical industry, the hospitality sector and the creative and cultural industries have also been accepted by the government. They will now be

invited to work up business plans ready for the next stage of the process. The aim is to have 12 academies operational by 2008.

### **Ends**

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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 planning and funding high-quality vocational 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 by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

#### Top Level Messages

- We plan and invest in high quality education and training for young people and adults that will build a skilled and competitive workforce.
- We help employers to get the training and skills they need for their business.
- We are transforming the further education sector to meet the needs of employers and the local community.
- We are committed to improving learning opportunities for everyone.

#### **National Skills Academy network**

The National Skills Academy network was initiated by the Government to address the need for a world class workforce and offer employers a totally new method of influencing the types of training and method of delivery.

The NSA programme builds on the success of the Pathfinder Fashion Retail Academy now open in London.

The National Skills Academies will be focussed on vocational education and skills training, delivering to young people (16-19 year olds) and adults and be sector-based centres of excellence with national reach.

Two rounds of bids for National Skills Academies have so far been run - both starting with the publication of a prospectus inviting expressions of interest, and followed by a panel assessment for the most persuasive and promising proposals. The assessment panel has government officials from a range of departments and agencies, but is weighted towards its employer membership, and has an independent employer chair. The panel selects those bids which it feels are sufficiently strong to go into a full phase of business planning. That phase may take up to a year and involves all the detailed preparation required to turn the vision of the Academy into a real life entity that can start delivering the required training. There is a final assessment made at the end of the business planning stage to verify that each NSA has a realistic plan for successful operations.

Sector Skills Councils are employer-led strategic bodies set up by Government to help raise business performance, meet skill needs and shape relevant learning supply within a given sector of the economy. Each one represents a sector with a workforce of at least 500,000. There are now 25 Sector Skills Councils covering around 85% of the UK workforce. They have a key role in National Skills Academies in pulling together bids and business plans, co-ordinating employer sponsorship, and working on curriculum content and liaison with learning providers.