

LSC CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISITS BOURNEMOUTH

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Geoff Russell, Chief Executive Officer of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), met managers and students during a visit to Paragon Skills for Industry and Bournemouth and Poole College.

Geoff Russell joined the LSC earlier this year after many years with the global accountancy firm KPMG – the final two years of which were spent on secondment to the Treasury. Keen to find out about the organisations the LSC funds, he has been visiting many colleges and providers across the country.

His first local port of call was the Bournemouth Technology Centre, the head office of Paragon Skills for Industry, an independent training provider that has ten centres across the south of England.

Welcomed by Gavin Freed, Paragon's CEO, Geoff Russell was given an overview of the business, which has over 4,000 learners on a variety of programmes, before being taken on a tour of the training workshops and classrooms where he met a number of young people on Apprenticeship programmes.

"He asked me if I'm enjoying my course" said 14 year old Alex Winston, from Bournemouth, who comes to the centre once a week from school as part of an engineering Young Apprenticeship. "I told him I was and that I want to go on to another level after I finish."

14 year old Charlie King, from Bournemouth, was equally enthusiastic. "I love finding out how everything works," she said. "I've already been offered a job at a local garage when I've completed my Apprenticeship."

According to Gavin Freed, Geoff Russell's visit to Paragon was a mutually significant one.

He said: "It was clear from our discussion that Geoff found it important to keep tabs on the real world challenges faced by training providers, such as Paragon Skills.

"In such a fast changing environment, meetings like this with senior management from the LSC are also essential in ensuring that our organisation is aligned with the strategic direction of the LSC and the government departments with which it works."

Geoff Russell's second visit of the day was to Bournemouth and Poole College where he and colleagues were greeted by the Principal, Lawrence Vincent.

Last year the college had been planning a major re-development but the capital funding freeze at the end of last year has put the plans on hold. The situation was discussed at some length before Geoff Russell and his party were taken on a tour of the college buildings.

"We had a professional and informed dialogue which I found very helpful" said Lawrence Vincent.

"I thought it was a very good visit and I was certainly impressed by Geoff's grasp of the issues we've been facing. Since our meeting, I've felt far more positive about the future of the college."

The visit ended with an opportunity for Geoff Russell to talk to students studying for a variety of different qualifications.

Before chatting to each of them in turn about what they were doing and what they were hoping to do in the future, he told them: "I enjoy being with students and finding out how they are getting on. It's an important part of my job. If I didn't get out and about like this, I'd be in grave danger of becoming out of touch with the very people the LSC is there to help."

Behnosh Khodabandalo, from Bournemouth, who is in the second year of a BTech Applied Science and Beauty Therapy programme, said she was impressed by the LSC's new Chief Executive.

"He came across as very professional and he seemed genuinely interested in us," she said. "I thought he was very approachable."

Ends

Photos (by Bernie Pettersen)

03: Fourteen year old Alex Winston, from Bournemouth show the scratch gauge he is working on at Paragon to LSC CEO Geoff Russell

16: Charlie King, 14, from Bournemouth (left) and Caroline Shave, 15, from Bournemouth, show Geoff Russell the car they are working on at Paragon

19: Gavin Freed, CEO of Paragon, and Geoff Russell look on as fourteen year olds Aaron Trim and Tom Barton, both from Bournemouth, find out more about the engine they are working on

35: Geoff Russell (left) with Bournemouth and Poole College Principal Lawrence Vincent during a tour of the college buildings

40: The LSC's new CEO Geoff Russell

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Further information from: Sue Bradbury (LSC public relations) on 01872 863863 or email sue@suebradburypr.com

NOTES TO EDITORS: 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. For more information visit: www.lsc.gov.uk/southwest .