

NHS SOUTH WEST LEADS UK WITH COMMITMENT TO SKILLS TRAINING

Date of issue 19 March, 2008

The South West has become the first region in the UK to have all of its NHS Trusts sign the Government's Skills Pledge – a commitment made by heads of organisations to train their staff and ensure they have the skills needed to compete on a regional and national basis.

By making the Pledge, all 41 of the NHS Trusts spanning the South West have made a commitment to enhance the level of health care services in the region by encouraging and supporting its employees to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills.

With Government assistance, the Trusts will support NHS employees to work towards valuable qualifications to at least NVQ Level 2 (equivalent to five GCSEs A*-C) as well as relevant higher level skills, enabling more people to contribute to the success of the organisations.

Overseeing a total population of more than five million, the NHS South West is both the largest employer and the largest health service region in England.

The participation of the Trusts pushes the number of employees who are now covered by the Skills Pledge, a key Government initiative to help boost the competitiveness of the UK, to well over 3.3 million nationwide.

John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, visited the region today to witness the signing of the Pledge and to congratulate the NHS South West for joining a region-wide commitment to skills.

Mr Denham called on employers across the South West to follow suit to ensure the region remains a leading centre for British skills. “Every employee has the potential to contribute to the long-term performance of organisations, but this potential can only be unlocked if they are given access to high-quality training.”

He added: “NHS trusts across the South West are to be congratulated by making a public commitment to develop the skills of their staff. By investing now, these organisations will improve their productivity, become world leaders in healthcare, and provide new opportunities for their employees and the community.”

The signing of the Skills Pledge, part of a plan to equip Britain’s workforce for the future and develop world-class skills by 2020, has been driven by a new Joint Investment Framework (JIF) between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the NHS South West Strategic Health Authority and Skills for Health. The partnership is focused on developing skills, learning and qualifications among NHS employees.

Malcolm Gillespie, South West Regional Director at the LSC, said: “The NHS in the South West has made a demonstrable declaration to support its employees to gain the skills and qualifications required to ensure the high level of health service delivery in the region is maintained.

“Through the Skills Pledge, we are aiming to ensure as many people as possible develop valuable employability skills and have the opportunity to access new training which is relevant to their jobs. Services such as Train to Gain, which offers impartial advice to identify skills needs and sources appropriate training solutions,

will enable South West's employers to achieve this goal and bring a host of business benefits."

Sir Ian Carruthers, Chief Executive of NHS South West, said the partnership will equip staff with the skill set required to ensure the NHS continues to deliver a world-class level of service.

"Our decision to sign the Skills Pledge underlines our commitment to improving the skills and opportunities for the 115,000 people working for the NHS in the region. It shows we are focused on developing a skilled workforce which provides an unrivalled level of healthcare service in the South West."

Jonathan Evans, South West Regional Director for Skills for Health, which helps to develop solutions in the delivery of skills in the health sector, said: "The drive to improve the skills and competencies of the region's health sector workforce is essential. The framework involving the NHS, the LSC and Skills for Health is a huge step forward in the provision of sustained skills training opportunities."

The JIF will also be focused on funding the skills development and qualifications at Levels 2, 3 and 4, Apprenticeships and Skills for Life. Compared to this time last year, 31,000 more 19-year-olds have achieved a Level 2 qualification and 18,000 more have achieved a Level 3 (2 A-levels or equivalent).¹

Over the last decade, Apprenticeship places have also risen from 75,000 to nearly 240,000, with more than 42,000 young people at 13,000 companies currently on work-based training programmes in the South West.

ENDS

¹ LSC report (2008) into Level 2 and Level 3 attainment by young people

Note to Editors:

All media enquiries, please contact:

Kelly Davis or Richard Cook at Bray Leino PR

T: 0117 973 1173; E: kdavis@brayleino.co.uk / rcook@brayleino.co.uk

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). For those employees who do not already have a 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. Employers may want to undertake a wider organisational needs analysis as the best way to work out how training can support their overall objectives. Other employers may want to go straight to an analysis of training needs or may already know their skills needs and want help in working out how best to meet those needs quickly and cost effectively.

The Skills Pledge was launched on the 14th June 2007 at an event in London attended by Gordon Brown, Alan Johnson, Sir Digby Jones and John Hutton at which 157 employers made their Pledge. Since the launch take up has steadily increased and data at the end of February 2008 indicates there are 2,130 employers who have made the Skills Pledge covering 3,331,219 employees. For further information visit <http://www.traintogain.gov.uk/skillspledge>