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PRESS RELEASE

SKILLSACTIVE BACKS VIRGIN ATLANTIC AND BRITISH AIRWAYS AS THEY JOIN FORCES TO SUPPORT LONDON'S OLYMPIC BID

SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning, is delighted with today's announcement that Virgin Atlantic Airways is to become an official sponsor of London 2012. This means that London will be unique among the cities bidding to host the 2012 Olympics Games and Paralympic Games as it will have the full support of two international airlines.

Announcing Virgin Atlantic's support, Chairman Richard Branson said:

"You'd normally expect to see us competing ferociously with BA – and normally you'd be right – but this is one issue on which we both see eye to eye. Britain is long overdue the honour of hosting the biggest sporting event in the world and London's bid to host the 2012 games is the best chance we've had in my lifetime.

"Under the leadership of Lord Coe, and with the full support of Tony Blair and Ken Livingstone, London is putting together a bid capable of winning the competition. The support of British business is vital to this and we're proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with BA on this issue. For once, we've put competition with each other to one side to put London, and Britain, first."

SkillsActive's Chief Executive Stephen Studd welcomed Virgin Atlantic on board as a supporter of the bid. He said,

"The Olympic Games is arguably the world's most important sporting event so it is vital that key business players support the bid, both financially and in terms of publicity.

"If the London bid is successful, Britain will receive a huge investment for sports training and facilities.

"Having the support of two international airlines shows that the London 2012 bid is serious and able to attract high-profile backing."

London 2012 Chairman and President, Lord Coe, is also delighted that Virgin Atlantic has joined forces with the London 2012 bid team and British Airways. Lord Coe said:

"This is a great boost to everyone working for the bid and associated with the bid. It shows that some companies are willing to put competition aside for the good of the London Olympic Games bid, for the good of London and the good of the UK.

"Virgin Atlantic and British Airways have shown what team work can achieve - both on and off the sporting field. The competition is not with each other but from the other Candidate Cities.

"This shows that London 2012 is a very serious bid, which, if successful, will bring major economic, health and community benefits to this country and will

leave London, the UK and the Olympic Movement with much needed new, world class sporting facilities for our young people and the athletes of the future. I urge everyone to follow the lead of Virgin Atlantic, British Airways, EDF Energy, BT and all our other partners and supporters and back the bid."

Virgin Atlantic will become a Premier Partner in London 2012's corporate support programme and the airline will mount a £1m campaign for the 2012 bid through a number of different channels including:

- Press and poster advertisements
- Promotions in the airline's Clubhouses
- Decals on the side of Virgin Atlantic's aircraft
- Website and in flight entertainment

The airline's activities will focus on two phases – the period leading up to the submission of the bid in November and the official International Olympic Committee inspection visit to London in Spring 2005. The final decision on which city will host the 2012 Olympic Games will be made by the IOC on 6 July 2005.

Richard Branson added:

"The public's support for the bids of the competing cities is one of the key criteria in evaluating the rival bids so Virgin Atlantic's campaign is aimed at rallying the enthusiastic support of the public in London and the rest of the UK. I know that our country's obsession with sport and our desire to see it performed at the highest level will show up in the IOC's research. And if Sydney and Barcelona are anything to go by our chances of winning gold medals will be really enhanced if we host it!

"The space on the fuselage of our beautiful aircraft is our most valuable asset and we've never previously used it to promote anyone else. But for something as important as this we're willing to make the sacrifice.

"As part of our bid we will be removing our other decals – like "No Way BA/AA" (part of our campaign against BA's proposed merger with American Airlines) – and replacing them with slogans supporting London 2012 like "Back the bid" and "Leap for London"."

Ends

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for sport & recreation, playwork, health and fitness, outdoor education/training and adventure and caravan industries.

2. SkillsActive's mission statement is: "To ensure best quality, best business and best value within the Sector to achieve its economic and social potential."

3. SSCs are employer-led organisations that aim to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their sector throughout the UK. SSCs provide employers with the opportunity to provide leadership to meet their sector's skills and business needs. In return they receive substantial public investment and greater dialogue with government departments across the UK.

4. For more information about SkillsActive, please visit our website @ www.skillsactive.com