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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

EMPLOYERS AT FOREFRONT OF NEW SKILLS DRIVE

The Government has unveiled plans to take forward the next phase of its skills strategy, reinforcing the role of the Skills for Business network.

In a White Paper published today the Government placed employers at the heart of the creation of a demand led education and skills system.

The Skills White Paper reinforces the role of Sector Skills Councils in developing the vocational curriculum and associated qualifications.

As a Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive looks forward to playing a key role in the employer brokerage service and the National Employer Training Programme (NETP), which guarantees everyone free access to the equivalent of 5 GCSEs.

A new regionally based employer brokerage service will be piloted with a view to enabling employers to negotiate a funding and training package to match the unique skills needs they have identified.

The White Paper also airs the concept of channelling mainstream funding through employers in the future, rather than direct to training providers.

The paper goes on to detail proposals to introduce sector-based "Skills Academies" by 2007/8 which will work with a renewed FE college network to deliver the vocational curriculum and associated products and services, (such as materials, qualifications and trainer-training) as centres of excellence serving a specific sector skill need.

Stephen Studd, SkillsActive Chief Executive, welcomed the White Paper saying: "Partnership and reform are the key themes of this White Paper. Employers are working together to give a clear sector message through their SSC which will underpin a partnership with education and training providers to reform and modernise skills development in this country."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for Sport and Recreation, Health and Fitness, Playwork, The Outdoors and the 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
5. SkillsActive is currently developing a Sector Skills Agreement for the Active Leisure and Learning Sector which will define the Sector's skills needs and ultimately form an agreement between employers, Government and funding partners to shape the workforce for the next ten years.