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

SPORTS OFFICIALS GO INTERACTIVE

Today sees the launch of the sportsofficialsUK brand new website.

sportsofficialsUK (soUK) is a group of representatives from a number of National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), working together to standardise officiating in the UK.

The group formed to address some of the common problems and recruitment issues encountered by sports and share examples of good practice in relation to the training and development of referees, umpires, stewards and judges.

SkillsActive the Sector Skills Council for sport and recreation is working with soUK to ensure its recognition as the organisation responsible for representing and supporting officials across the UK.

SkillsActive's entry to the workforce manager, Steve Mitchell said: "SkillsActive support and applaud the development of the sportsofficialsUK website as integral to promoting the work of referees, umpires, marshals and judges across the UK.

"We hope that the name becomes recognised as the voice of sports officials in the UK and will work in partnership with NGBs to upskill the workforce, identify clear and coherent employment pathways, and integrate the work of officials into school curriculum in the hope that young people recognise that without an official, their sporting opportunities would be severely diminished."

Chris White, professional rugby union referee who took charge of the Rugby World Cup semi-final between Australia and New Zealand in 2003 said: "I am delighted that under this project a diverse range of sports are collaborating on areas of best practice in officiating. It offers exciting possibilities to enhance the image and standards of officiating in all these sports. I wish the participants every success."

Heavily involved in soUK himself, Andy Melrose, the Rugby Football Union's referee development officer for the South West, believes developing National Occupational Standards is vital to attract more people into officiating: "Standards for officiating gives the role greater credibility within the sports; that then leads to more recruitment and retention not just of referees but also of administrators within officiating."

SkillsActive is holding regional and UK-wide consultations on developing National Occupational Standards for officials over the next six months.

-ENDS-

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. sportofficialsUK can be found at: www.sportofficialsuk.com
2. SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for Sport and Recreation, Health and Fitness, Playwork, The Outdoors and the Caravan industries.
3. SkillsActive's mission statement is: "To ensure best quality, best business and best value within the Sector to achieve its economic and social potential."
4. 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.
5. For more information about SkillsActive, please visit our website @ www.skillsactive.com
6. 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.