

News Release: Date: Monday, 5 September 2006: For immediate use.



*****NEWS RELEASE*****

THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR – THE UK'S MAJOR EMPLOYER

The Voluntary and Community Sector is a major employer with a workforce of at least 608,000 paid employees and several million unpaid volunteers. An estimated 1.1 million full time UK workers would be needed to replace the work of unpaid volunteers.

There are increasing expectations being placed upon voluntary and community organisations of all shapes and sizes as providers of public services. Government is demonstrating a growing support for the sector and the role it plays in contributing to the social and economic regeneration of the nation, via the Compact, Change Up and now through the Comprehensive Spending Review of the future role of the Third Sector.

In 2004, SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for Active Leisure and Learning, was assigned lead responsibility for the Voluntary and Community Workforce Project across the Skills for Business Network (SfBN). Working closely with the UK Voluntary and Community Sector Workforce Development Hub the main aims of the project are to:

- Support the SfBN in meeting the skills needs of the UK's voluntary and community workforce;
- Ensure the SfBN is the central place for advice on the voluntary and community workforce.

The project is now in its third phase, and is now focusing on extending the work done in phase one and two, which includes building the capacity of SSCs finding sustainable approaches to workforce development and strengthening the partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector UK Workforce Hub.

Shaks Ghosh, Chief Executive of Crisis and SSDA Board Member, said: "We hear much about UK plc but we must not forget the importance of building communities in the UK. The Voluntary and Community Sector is unique in the way it reaches into the very heart of our communities. I am delighted to be involved in this vital project which will develop the skills and expertise for the growing role that the Sector will play in tomorrow's UK"

-ENDS-

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Compact is the agreement between government and the voluntary and community sector in England to improve their relationship for mutual advantage
2. Change Up is a framework to strengthening the support and assistance available to voluntary and community organisations.
3. The Skills for Business network aims to boost the productivity and profitability of the UK, by identifying and tackling skills gaps and shortages on a sector by sector basis.
5. Crisis is a national charity fighting homelessness
6. The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) is responsible for funding, supporting and monitoring the network of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs).
7. SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for Sport and Recreation, Health and Fitness, Playwork, The Outdoors and the Caravan industries.
8. SkillsActive's mission statement is: "To ensure best quality, best business and best value within the Sector to achieve its economic and social potential."
9. 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.
10. For more information about SkillsActive, please visit our website @ www.skillsactive.com
11. 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.
12. SkillsActive is *Shaping Skills for the Future*, through...
 - PEOPLE...
...ensuring all people in the sector are appropriately trained and qualified.
 - PRODUCTIVITY...
...ensuring better performance through the professional development of the sector.
 - PROVISION...
...ensuring the sector has accessible, relevant and funded training across the UK.
 - PROMOTION...
...ensuring the contributions of the sector are recognised at a governmental level.

