

## **Skills Pledge Speech (841 words).**

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008.**

### **Stoke.**

- Bill, today I want to welcome you to the West Midlands and welcome your push on skills.
- In my first speech as regional Minister I said that after sealing a deal in New Street station, skills was our top priority.
- 8 months later I was able to launch our first Skills Action Plan. I said it was frankly a breakthrough.
- A breakthrough because for the first time we set out a new agenda for delivering new jobs and better wages to our region.

- It represented the blueprint for unlocking our full potential; creating new wealth that is more equally shared; an optimism that is more equally shared; and optimism about the opportunities.
- When Labour came to power more than a decade ago, our first priority was to create jobs. In our region, unemployment has almost halved since 1997. Now, we must be more ambitious.
- Today, and in the future, our mission is not just to secure jobs but jobs with real prospects; jobs that give people opportunities to acquire skills that employers need to deliver an economy based on high skills and high quality.
- This is how we equip our businesses with the tools they need to thrive in a global economy.

- My visits to India and China this year left me in no doubt how success and prosperity will be secured for our region – yes, we must be conscious of cost structure and scale; but drawing on the West Midlands reputation for innovation and enterprise will give us a sharp competitive edge.
- Leitch estimates only 600,000 UK jobs requiring no qualifications by 2020 compared with 3.5m unskilled currently. New mantra – **‘no jobs without skills’**.
- You in your department Bill, are offering new support. We are well placed in the West Midlands to take full advantage of the opportunities these policies present.
- Our record in delivering new skills and qualifications through the national Train to Gain service is second to none. 60,000 learners and 10,000 businesses in the

region having benefited from skills needs analysis and bespoke training over the past 18 months.

- We have the best performing Apprenticeship programme in the country.
- In our colleges last year, over 32,000 adults took a full Level 2 qualification – that's equivalent to five good GCSEs – the largest number nationally in any region, regardless of size.
- Through the City Strategy Pathfinder work, 41,000 people achieved Level 2 qualifications – double the target and the initiative also made a huge difference to the prospects of people with gaps in their basic skills in the shape of over 32,000 Skills for Life qualifications.

- We are now Government's first region to be asked to be in the vanguard as the new welfare and skills structures bed down.
- To date, 578 employers in the region have made their commitment to the pledge, amounting to a total workforce of 80,315 employees who will benefit from increased training provisions.
- This is a considerable achievement as this means that over half of all the businesses nationally who have made the skills pledge come from the West Midlands.
- But we need to keep our momentum.
- That's why the region's Skills Action Plan sets targets for the next three years of a 50 per cent rise in the number of employers with Apprentices – up from 12,000 to 18,000;

- More than 8,000 more Apprentices in public service; and a 25 per cent boost to the number of graduates recruited by West Midlands businesses, particularly from the region's own universities.
  
- That's why: Skills Action Plan (SAP)
  - Aims
  - Streamline business support and skill delivery.
  - Transfer skills brokerage / funding into single business support service.
  - All publicly funded workforce skills investment channelled through Train to Gain.
  
- Progress:
  - New partnership of AWM, LSC and major business organisations to shape strategy and delivery.

- Skills morning last Monday showed partnership starting to make a difference.
- Most successful Train to Gain region.
- Highest regional total of employers committed to Skills Pledge.
  
- That's why we must engage public service employers – nearly 30% of West Midlands workforce. I launched Public Service Skills challenge in October with key targets:
  - Apprentices to rise by 8,000
  - 75,000 upskilled to level 2.
  
- Progress:
  - Over half organisations I have written to have signed up to the Challenge.
  - Encouraging to see LSC and SHA co-funding joint investment plan with £5m each for skills.

- West Midlands Police committed to recruit 100 new apprentices over the next 12 months.
- Commenting about the economic and social wellbeing of his adopted city, Joseph Chamberlain expressed the view that “the welfare and security of the whole depend upon the contentment and happiness of every part”.
- Those words ring as true today as they did more than a century ago. This Government is committed to creating fair and equal access to prosperous and sustainable futures and in realising that vision, our region will fulfil its potential.