

NEWS RELEASE

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EAL HOSTS SKILLS FOR ECONOMIC SUCCESS DEBATE

Educational awarding organisation leads debate to find industry-led solutions for skills sector issues

Leading awarding organisation, EAL (EMTA Awards Ltd), yesterday hosted the *Skills for Economic Success* round table in London. Attended by Conservative MP John Hayes, as well as employers from large industry players such as Airbus UK and CMB Plc, employer bodies and sector skills council representatives, the debate focused on how interested parties can work together to ensure the UK has a skills system which is fit for purpose: to deliver a skilled workforce that will rebuild the British economy.

John Hillier, EAL Executive Consultant who chaired the meeting, used his opening remarks to highlight the challenges faced by those in and involved with vocational education. He stated that even before the current economic down turn, one of the most significant challenges to business success faced by the engineering, building services engineering and manufacturing sectors was a shortage of skilled people.

During the debate, there was broad agreement that the UK needs to rebalance its economy and its employment base, with engineering and manufacturing playing a much greater role. It was also agreed that sectors such as building services need to become less reliant on temporary labour and skilled people from outside the UK. Apprenticeships were seen as important to the sector but equally important was up-skilling the existing workforce.

Attendees discussed the difficulties of raising apprenticeship numbers especially amongst SMEs, despite Conservative plans set out by John Hayes to provide government subsidies to smaller companies for apprenticeship places.

Iain Macdonald, the ECA's Head of Education and Training commented: "I welcome the Conservatives' aspiration to increase the number of apprentices by 100,000. However, I remain concerned that there may not be enough employers able to support this goal and that other factors may need to change, such as the shortening of an apprenticeship or the severing of the link between employment and apprenticeship - neither of which would be desirable outcomes."

Richard Morley, Managing Director of CMB PLC added: "A lack of knowledge and skills will be a major barrier to achieving the economic rebalancing that is needed if businesses face the same shortage of qualified people once the economy picks up and employment levels begin to rise. To be successful as an advanced economy, we need to focus on both the technical and vocational frameworks inherent in the apprenticeship. In other words, we need the science and the knowledge to apply the skills."

Keith Marshall, SummitSkills agreed, saying: "We must not repeat the mistakes we made in the last recession. Training and qualifications need to focus on what businesses need to take them out of this recession, not what they were doing as we went in; the green agenda will be particularly important."

John Hayes, MP and Shadow Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further & Higher Education, who spoke at the event, said: "An advanced economy needs advanced skills and unless we grapple with this now, the UK will not be able to successfully compete on the global stage."

John Hayes MP continued: "Pushing the skills agenda is not only important for the economy; it is vital for giving individuals a sense of purpose and creating a cohesive society. Britain needs to start valuing vocational skills as a way to harness ambition and to create a clear and progressive route for career advancement. In addition, we need to slash bureaucracy in the UK's vocational training system to make it more sector-relevant, flexible and responsive to the very real needs of individuals and employers."

Following the round table, Ann Watson, managing director, EAL commented: "EAL remains committed to providing the best training possible for the next generation of skilled British workers. As a sector-led awarding body, our expertise in engineering and building services makes us well placed to support John Hayes' commitment to a sector led approach for skills; a pledge we welcome."

Ann Watson concluded: "We achieved exactly what we wanted; bringing together employers, employer bodies and politicians to kick start the discussion on how we can all work together to cultivate a skills system that will successfully deliver the skilled workforce to rebuild the British economy as we come out of one of the deepest recessions we have seen. We hope to keep the dialogue going and are aiming to host a follow-up event in early 2010, extending the discussion to provide clarity to some of the unanswered questions."

The round table was attended by:

- John Hayes, MP, Shadow Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further & Higher Education
- Elizabeth Bonfield, Policy Adviser, EAL
- Ann Watson, Managing Director, EAL
- John Hillier, Executive Consultant, EAL
- Iain Macdonald, Head of Education & Training, ECA
- Nigel Fletcher, Skills Policy Adviser, EEF
- Luke Tryl, Researcher, Reform
- Mark Spilsbury, Chief Economist, UKCES
- Sue Densley, Head of Programmes, QCA
- Eva de Marchi Taylor, Policy Manager, SMMT
- Ben Coates, Special Adviser, Conservative Research Department
- Keith Marshall, CEO, SummitSkills
- Gary Griffiths, Manager Apprenticeships & Vocational Competencies, AIRBUS UK
- Richard Morley, Managing Director, CMB PLC

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

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About EAL:

EAL (EMTA Awards Ltd) awards vocational qualifications in across the building services and engineering sectors. With more than 40 years experience, EAL's qualifications are recognised as representing the highest standard of practical achievement.

Committed to service excellence, EAL was ranked first for customer service amongst its peers in its Customer Satisfaction Survey for both 2006 and 2008. EAL awards qualifications across a variety of sectors, including manufacturing and engineering, with 76% of all engineering N/SVQs in the UK being awarded by EAL.

EAL is working closely with Ofqual (Office of the Qualifications & Examinations Regulator) to implement the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF), and to minimise any resulting disruption to its centres, learners and employers. For further details about QCF, please see: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk>.