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Engineering apprentices take top spots at LSC Apprenticeship Awards

– Industry secures first and second places in Advanced Apprenticeship category –

Apprentices from the engineering sector took centre stage at the recent Learning and Skills Councils Apprenticeship Awards 2008.

Now in their fifth year, the annual awards recognise the hard work and commitment of vocational learners who have completed or are working towards an Apprenticeship. Over 1,000 entries were received for this year's awards, which also acknowledge the efforts of employers who successfully use Apprenticeship schemes to improve business performance.

For the first time, female apprentices secured three of the four most coveted awards in 2008, with two having trained in sectors that are traditionally associated with men: aerospace engineering and pharmaceuticals.

Winner Rachael Hoyle (Advanced Apprentice of the Year) and runner-up Jacob Stimpson (highly commended in the same category) both benefited from vocational qualifications developed by EAL (Emta Awards Limited). EAL is the UK's leading awarding body for National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N/SVQs), awarding 76% of engineering qualifications and working closely with Semta – the employer-led sector skills council for the science, engineering and manufacturing industries – to help develop a competent workforce and combat skills gaps.

Rachael trained with XChanging, an EAL-approved training provider that has supported apprenticeship schemes at BAE Systems' training centre in Preston since 2001. Jacob trained at City College Plymouth, another EAL centre with apprentices involved in Boat Building and Maintenance, and Marine Engineering. As a specialist engineering awarding body, EAL offers a 'one-stop shop' for apprenticeship components, with a range of qualifications including NVQs, Key Skills and Technical Certificates.

Ann Watson, managing director of EAL, said: "We are delighted to see young engineers achieving such commendable results and embracing the opportunities for personal and professional development offered by apprenticeship schemes. Growth and productivity in engineering relies on workers with the right skills and competencies to succeed, and the combination of on-the-job training and nationally-recognised qualifications provides apprentices with the best possible preparation for a career in industry.

"Both Rachael and Jacob have shown a commitment to achieving the best results, and their success gives them a potential route into higher employment and further education. EAL is committed to working with colleges, training providers and employers to support apprenticeship schemes and maintain the

highest standards of qualification materials and customer service. Working with a specialist engineering awarding body helps centres coordinate their training delivery and work with apprentices to develop skills that are invaluable to employers and the industry as a whole."

Rachael, 21, completed her Advanced Apprenticeship in Aerospace Engineering and has since secured a full-time position in the Structural Engineering department at BAE Systems. She took full responsibility for a crucial package of work that secured a contractual milestone for the company in November 2007, and has also used her engineering skills to help manufacture a special bath for stroke victims. In her spare time, she speaks at local schools and events promoting both Apprenticeships and women in engineering.

Jacob, 26, completed his Advanced Apprenticeship in Boat Building and Maintenance with Princess Yachts International in Plymouth. Finishing in just under three years, Jacob has shown not only a high level of workmanship, but also dedication and commitment to his chosen career. After proving his superior level of workmanship, Jacob was trusted to represent the company abroad by working solo on Princess Yachts around the world – a first for a third-year apprentice. He is convinced of the benefits of continued study and is now working towards a Team Leader certificate.

Lynn Tomkins, Semta Director of UK Operations, said: "The fact that engineering apprentices have featured so prominently in these Awards, not only reflects positively on their own hard work and talent, but also to the apprenticeship programmes run by their employers. Both Semta and EAL have been working closely with employers in the engineering sectors on plugging skills gaps and encouraging greater diversity in their workforce and it is clear that this work is starting to bear fruit.

"Semta launched the first UK skills plans for both the aerospace and marine engineering sectors in January 2006 and May 2007 respectively, working in conjunction with employers, trade bodies, government, unions, qualification authorities, award bodies and education and training providers. Sector Skills Agreements map out exactly the skills employers need to remain productive and competitive and set outline how these skills can be delivered.

"These industries are vital to the UK economy. UK-based aerospace activity is worth in excess of £17bn, and contributes around £6bn to UK GVA (Gross Value Added) and the industry employers around 123,000 employees, at over 700 UK sites. However, 33% of aerospace companies in England have hard to fill vacancies leading to loss of business and restricting growth. In addition, there are a range of skills gaps, with 75% of these being in technical engineering skills.

"Boatbuilding and leisure marine equipment manufacture is a growth sector in the UK, employing around 16,000 people and contributing over £1bn to UK GDP. Yacht building is a thriving high export sector competing against strong international players and striving to win an increasing share of a growing world market. The marine sector needs to maintain high standards of management and leadership in order to drive change and respond to fast moving developments in new products. The sector increasingly relies on world class management skills such as implementing supply chain management, lean manufacturing processes and providing excellent workforce development.

Sector Skills Agreements enable Semta to work with employers in these industries to address this deficit by attracting more talented young people, like Rachael and Jacob."

The winners were presented with their Awards at a ceremony at the Royal Horticultural Hall in Central London on 10th July.

- Ends -

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Semta (Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies)

- Semta is the employer-led skills council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies in the UK. The sectors it represents are: Aerospace, Automotive, Bioscience, Electrical, Electronics, Maintenance, Marine, Mathematics, Mechanical, Metals and Engineered Metal Products and Science. Its role is to the raise skills levels and competitiveness in the 76,000 companies and 1.4 million-strong workforce that make up these sectors.

EAL (EMTA Awards Limited)

- EAL has 76% of the market share for engineering NVQs at Levels 1-5. As an awarding body, it offers a broad range of qualifications in other occupational areas including administration, business-improvement techniques, management, and learning and development. Its NVQs, Key Skills and Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) cover all elements of engineering apprenticeship frameworks, providing a 'one-stop shop' for centres to deliver high-quality vocational training. EAL is part of the Semta group.