

NEWS RELEASE

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West Midlands Region welcomes skills challenge

The West Midlands welcomes the challenge set by the Minister for the Region, Liam Byrne MP, to transform the Region's skill base; particularly around young people; upskilling substantial numbers of the public sector workforce, and getting local people without jobs into work.

Mr Byrne made his announcement today at the offices of the Regional Assembly and Local Government Association in Birmingham, when he challenged public sector leaders to:

- Provide 8,000 new Apprenticeships across the Region
- Recruit 10,000 local people not in work into entry level and essential occupations in public services
- Boost jobs for young people, by raising the number of adults under 25 employed in public services by 25 per cent
- Increase the overall number of young people taking up an Apprenticeship by 20 per cent.

Mr Byrne said: "We are not short of jobs but we know that in the next decade, five million more jobs with skills will be needed. We need to equip British workers in the West Midlands to be the first in the queue. That means a big cut in the number of young people not in education, employment or training."

Mr Byrne says he has targeted the public sector because it is a huge employer with 27 per cent of the Regional workforce employed in the sector.

David S Smith, Chairman of the Assembly and Association said: "We welcome this initiative and are looking forward to continuing the work that is already going on here in the Region to make public sector a first career choice for everyone including graduates, and ensuring people have the right skills to contribute to the workplace."

Olwen Dutton, Chief Executive of the Assembly and Association added: "This should be seen as part of the public sector's wider responsibility to tackle deprivation and accelerate the regeneration of communities and the growth of the regional economy. There are already many good examples

in the West Midlands in. In Birmingham and Solihull, work is ongoing with Birmingham Learning and Skills Partnership to meet a specific action plan around unemployment in certain Birmingham wards. This is a great initiative if we are able to identify real need such as the types of jobs on offer and ensuring communities have something to offer employers.”

Christine Kerr, Chief Executive regional lead on skills on added: “There is currently a great need to boost jobs for young people by increasing the number of adults under 25 employed in public services by 25 per cent.

“We also need to take into account that the public sector needs to develop greater capacity and focus on workforce planning to encourage local authorities to take a view about future workforce patterns and needs and anticipate gaps in labour and skills.”

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Notes to editors:

WMRA

1. The West Midlands Regional Assembly ('the Assembly') represents a wide range of democratic, social and economic interests throughout the West Midlands region.
2. The Assembly's membership consists of 100 nominated representatives, with 68 members representing the local authority, 16 representing the business sector and 16 representing other economic and social partners.
3. The Assembly provides a platform for organisations to consider matters of common concern including: regional planning, transport, economic prosperity, sustainability, culture and Europe. It also supports regional policy forums and task groups on social inclusion, faith, housing, life long learning/skills, health, rural and community safety/crime reduction.
4. The Assembly works in partnership with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) the regional development agency (RDA), the Government Office West Midlands (GOWM), Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) the West Midlands Local Government Association (WMLGA) and other regional and local organisations from across the West Midlands region.
5. The Assembly's Regional Planning Partnership is the designated Regional Planning Body for the West Midlands, and is also responsible for scrutinising the operation of the region's RDA, Advantage West Midlands.
6. For further information, visit our website www.wmra.gov.uk
7. The Independent Performance Assessment was undertaken by the National Audit Office as part of an examination of all 8 English Regional Development Agencies at the request of the Department of Trade and Industry.
8. The final report can be downloaded from Advantage West Midlands' website www.advantagewm.co.uk

WMLGA

WMLGA is the Association of the 38 local authorities in the West Midlands Region, comprising the Metropolitan District Councils of Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton; The Unitary Authorities of Herefordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Telford and Wrekin; and the County and District Councils of Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

The WMLGA Secretariat is based in Birmingham.