

Press Release

13 July 2006

Blackburne House Women's Technology and Education Centre's Educational Light Shines Bright



The Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Bill Rammell, presented Learning and Skills Beacon status to the Blackburne House Women's Technology and Education Centre at ceremony in Westminster yesterday.

The Liverpool-based Blackburne House Women's Technology and Education Centre was established in 1983 with the aim of equipping low paid or unemployed women with the skills to work in technical and non-traditional professions. Blackburne House has since expanded its remit to include not only women embarking upon education for the first time but also professional women looking to broaden their skills and enhance their career prospects.

The centre provides a range of courses for women and was awarded a triple Grade 1 by the Adult Learning Inspectorate last year for its foundation programmes and for its approach to leadership and management, and equality of opportunity.

The Blackburne House Women's Technology and Education Centre is one of 14 new Beacons. They are the first to receive the status since the Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning (QIA) assumed responsibility for it in April this year.

Learning and Skills Beacon status recognises and celebrates learning providers in the post-16 education sector that deliver high quality and innovative teaching as well

as being well-led and managed. Beacons are expected to work with QIA to help improve the performance of colleges and other providers in the sector.

Claire Dove MBE, Chief Executive of the Blackburne House group of companies was delighted: “Being awarded Beacon status is a truly wonderful accolade. It recognises the commitment and passion of all involved with the organisation who strive to provide the highest quality learning experience. We will now use this status to provide examples of good practice and will work to build the capacity of other similar institutions.”

Bill Rammell said he was delighted to be awarding the status to so many organisations.

“Each and every one of today’s new Beacons has won its prestigious status on merit and through its own hard work. This proves their all round excellence in not just the teaching and learning they deliver, but also in the way they are managed and led. These Beacons are a hugely important addition to the established network which is working with the Quality Improvement Agency to lead improvement, reform and change in the post-16 sector.

“Further Education is vital to this country’s prosperity. The sweeping changes we announced in our recent FE White Paper this year mean colleges and providers can go on raising their game to provide the training employers demand. We want to raise standards by encouraging more specialised Centres of Vocational Excellence geared to meet local needs. The sharing of best practice and improved capacity is what Beacons are all about and typify the reform we want to see across the country.”

The Quality Improvement Agency’s Chief Executive, Andrew Thomson, also congratulated the new Beacons.

“I’m very pleased to see these organisations’ commitment to excellence in education and training because that is what the QIA has been set up to champion. They deserve this public recognition of their outstanding performance.

“We believe that the post-16 sector can be a high-performing sector if every organisation in it embraces a culture of continuous self-improvement. Today’s awards ceremony shows there are organisations which are already a long way down that path and reaping the benefits of innovation and improvement. Their best practice needs to be made available to the sector so that others can benefit from their experience.”

There are now 88 Learning and Skills Beacons in England. They include general FE colleges, tertiary colleges, sixth form colleges, work based learning providers and, adult community learning providers.

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Notes to editors

Learning and Skills Beacons

- The following organisations have been awarded Learning and Skills Beacon status:

Provider Name	Type of Provider	Location
Bells Training Services	Work Based Learning Provider (retail industry)	Cleveland
Godalming College	Sixth Form College	Godalming, Surrey
Hereford Sixth Form College	Sixth Form College	Hereford, Herefordshire
Nelson & Colne College	Tertiary College	Nelson, Lancashire
Northern Ballet School	Dance School	Manchester
Peter Symonds College	Sixth Form College	Winchester, Hampshire
Runshaw College	Tertiary College	Leyland, Lancashire
South Downs College	General FE College	Waterlooville, Hampshire
South Trafford College	General FE College	Altrincham, Cheshire
St Mary’s College	Sixth Form College	Blackburn, Lancashire
Stubbing Court Training Ltd	Work Based Learning Provider (equestrian industry)	Chesterfield, Derbyshire
Toni & Guy Academy	Work Based Learning Provider (hair and beauty industry)	Manchester

Winstanley College	Sixth Form College	Wigan, Lancashire
Blackburne House Women's Technology and Education Centre	Adult Community Learning Provider	Liverpool

- Learning and Skills Beacon status recognises excellence and innovation and is awarded to organisations which demonstrate outstanding performance in teaching and learning supported by outstanding leadership and management. Organisations with the status are expected to play a key role in leading improvement, reform and change in the sector.
- Learning and Skills Beacon status is awarded to post-16 colleges and other learning providers funded by the Learning and Skills Council and inspected by the Office for Standards (OFSTED) or the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).
- The Learning and Beacon status award was started by the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) Standards Unit and is now funded by the Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning – a new Non-Departmental Public Body created in April 2006 (see below). UK Skills is currently contracted to manage the selection and awards process for the Learning and Skills Beacon status on behalf of the QIA. UK Skills is an independent organisation which champions skills and learning for work through competitions, awards and events.
- There are 88 Learning and Skills Beacons in England. Since the status was introduced in 2002, it has been awarded to general FE colleges, tertiary colleges, sixth form colleges, agricultural and horticultural colleges, specialist residential colleges, work based learning providers, adult community learning providers and a Higher Education Institution which is delivering FE and work-based learning. A breakdown of Learning and Skills Beacons by region and type of provider is available on request.
- For more information on Learning and Skills Beacon Status please visit www.beaconstatus.org.

Quality Improvement Agency

- The Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning (QIA) started its business on 3 April 2006. It has been set up by the government to speed up quality improvement, increase participation and raise standards and achievement in the learning and skills sector. QIA's role is to create a strong strategic focus on improving quality in further education and training. It will lead the development of a quality improvement strategy for the sector and it will help education and training organisations to respond to the government's strategic priorities. Its key role will be to commission a range of services provided and delivered by other organisations.
- Plans to set up QIA were first announced by the former Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, at the LSDA conference in June 2004. The new agency is an executive NDPB (non-departmental public body) with a board appointed by ministers. It has 64 staff and is based in Coventry in line with the Lyons Review,

with shared corporate services provided by the DfES to minimise administrative overheads. Creating the QIA will streamline current quality improvement arrangements and enable the DfES to achieve savings identified through the Efficiency Review of £26 million by 2007-08 through further rationalisation of quality improvement activities.

- Pursuing Excellence: an outline improvement strategy for the further education system. The QIA is currently consulting widely on a sector wide improvement strategy. More details can be downloaded at www.qia.gov.uk/pursuingexcellence