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Diploma Champion for Employers praises model school~company links

Sir Alan Jones, chairman of Sector Skills Council, Semta, and chairman emeritus of Toyota UK, today visited a West Midlands school to see an award-winning education~industry partnership in action. The scheme is being used as a model for the local delivery of the new Diplomas for 14-19 year olds which Sir Alan is championing on behalf of employers nationwide.

St Michael's C of E High School in Sandwell hosted the visit to demonstrate how the successful Metals Academy Black Country Industry~Schools Partnership works in practice.

Funded through the Metals Academy by the Iron and Steel (West Midlands) Trust and co-ordinated by Sandwell Education Business Partnership (EBP), the initiative provides teacher placements, company visits and work experience programmes for pupils, and 'ambassadors' – apprentices who have been specially trained to help with project work in the classroom. Earlier this year the scheme won three local EBP awards and a national award.

Said Sir Alan: "Successful company/school partnerships like this are key to the new 14-19 Diplomas which put learning into a real work context and inspire young people to participate and achieve. I'd recommend other employers to follow this partnership's lead and ensure that future generations have the skills, learning and attitudes that business really needs."

As well speaking to pupils about their work experience, the Diploma Champion also heard Sarah While, design and technology teacher skills co-ordinator, explain how her placements in Metsec and Corus had benefited her teaching. Sir Alan then sat in on her GCSE manufacturing lesson.

Sarah said: "The teacher placement has been a valuable experience. Time spent out of school and in the workplace has allowed me to experience industry and produce quality resources to help deliver the GCSE manufacturing syllabus. I'm more confident now, having experienced areas such as quality control and health and safety, and hopefully this is reflected in the overall quality of teaching and learning."

Sandwell EBP is part of a consortium bid to deliver the Engineering Diploma and will soon be bidding to deliver the Manufacturing Diploma. Manager, Gary Clark, said: "The relationship that the Metals Academy has with schools is exemplary. We see this model as a vehicle for delivering the new diplomas and want to see it rolled out for the benefit of schools in other areas. The commitment from the employers has been outstanding. It's helped engineers understand issues in schools and schools are benefiting by seeing how they contribute to business in making sure their young people are equipped for working life."

Said Stephen Tilsley, chairman of MetSkill and managing director of participating company Metsec plc: "We want teachers to be able to come into our companies, collect examples to bring the curriculum alive and bring pupils in to see for themselves. It helps convey accurate messages about working in industry to more young people year on year so that they can benefit when making career decisions.

"It's a win-win situation: teachers can be sure they're delivering the curriculum in a way that's relevant and reflects current industrial best practice; industry benefits by showing what engineering and manufacturing is really like and the excellent training and career prospects we offer."

Ends

Quality images of Sir Alan's visit are available on request.

Media contact: Nikola Alevizos, E: n.alevizos@metskill.co.uk,

T: 0114 244 6833

Notes to Editors:

1. MetSkill is the strategic skills body for the UK metals industry and is part of Semta - the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.
2. The Metals Academy is a MetSkill initiative which works with schools and employers, offering a value-added service to employers with additional training, social and networking opportunities for apprentices. It advises young people on career opportunities, helps match applicants to vacancies and oversees the training of apprentices to ensure the highest quality standards are upheld.
3. Diplomas are new qualifications designed to give young people aged 14-19 a broad education, blending knowledge of a vocational area with maths, English, ICT, personal learning and thinking skills. Diplomas are being developed in 14 areas of learning. Available at three levels, they prepare young people for university, further learning, training or employment. Selected schools and colleges in England will begin offering the Engineering Diploma from September 2008. The Manufacturing Diploma will be available from 2009.
4. St Michaels is one of four schools and six metals firms to have signed the partnership agreement which takes teachers and pupils into companies and brings people from industry into schools.

Participating schools are: Holly Lodge High School, Manor Foundation Business, Enterprise and Sports College, St Michael's C of E School, Wodensborough Community Technology College.
Participating companies are: Arcelor Mittal, Corus Distribution and Building Systems, Edward Howell Galvanizers Ltd, JB & S Lees, Metsec plc, William King Ltd.