

# National Economic Forum focuses on youth employment

Youth employment has topped the agenda at Scotland's ninth National Economic Forum, held today at Edinburgh's Corn Exchange.

As part of the focus on getting more of Scotland's young people into work, First Minister Alex Salmond and Youth Employment Minister Angela Constance have met with a number of young people currently working in training positions across central Scotland.

It is the first time that young workers have been specifically invited to attend the forum.

Held the day after the publication of the Scottish Government's Youth Employment Strategy, the NEF is the first since the appointment of Angela Constance as the UK's first dedicated employment minister. It is being attended by seven ministers and cabinet secretaries, as well as around 200 representatives of the private sector and members of the public, trade union and third sectors.

Nine young workers – from companies including First Group, the Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Water and Lloyds Banking Group – took part in the face-to-face session with the First Minister and Ms Constance.

First Minister Alex Salmond said:

“Jobs and economic growth are this government's top priorities and I think youth employment most of all is critical. The economic cost of unemployment is significant but the cost of youth unemployment in disaffection and disillusionment is even greater.

“We have a range of measures to tackle this issue and we are making progress but we can and we must do better. We know we are not immune to the consequences of international economic uncertainty and the severe austerity measures being imposed by Westminster.

“However, the appointment of Angela Constance as Scotland’s – indeed, the UK’s – first ever dedicated Youth Employment Minister and the publication of the Youth Employment Strategy reflects how serious we are about the action we are taking.

“Key measures include our pledge to deliver 25,000 modern apprenticeships each year over the lifetime of this parliament and the commitment to every 16-19 year old who is not in an apprenticeship, in training, full-time education or a job to be offered a training place.

“Perhaps the most important part of today’s proceedings for me has been the face-to-face session with a number of young workers in training positions throughout Scotland, both hearing how they have been helped into the workplace and what more we can do to help others in the weeks and months to come.”

Youth Employment Minister Angela Constance added:

“Engaging with young people directly is crucial to tackling the difficulties they face in finding employment and training opportunities. Today’s meetings follows a very productive session with young people placed at the Marriott Hotel in Glasgow and Hewlett Packard in Erskine and I am very keen that that we keep hearing about such experiences.

“Scotland’s first ever Youth Employment Strategy has now been published, containing a number of actions across the whole of the public, private and third sectors to ensure there is a national solution to a national problem. We want to build on the publication and today’s Forum and help improve the life chances for all Scotland’s young people.”