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BILLY ARMSTRONG MLA

ULSTER UNIONIST ASSEMBLY MEMBER FOR MID-ULSTER

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Armstrong welcomes Minister's Announcement re Apprenticeships

Mid-Ulster MLA Billy Armstrong has commended the Minister for Employment & Learning on his "widely recognised efforts" to develop Northern Ireland's skills base through apprenticeship training.

The UUP Assemblyman said;

"I must applaud Sir Reg Empey's pro-active approach to the major threats posed to the apprenticeship scheme by the economic downturn and the consequent inevitable rise in the level of unemployment.

The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) has been proactive in addressing the adverse impacts of the economic downturn on the apprenticeship programme which is so vital to skilling our young people to a level which will make them an important part of the equation for attracting inward investment and for building new business on a sound skills base.

It is also worth remembering that the target breaking record of DEL - before the worst of this recession began to bite - deserved to be commended.

When Apprenticeships NI was launched in September 2008, the Department restated its commitment to 10,000 apprentices being in training at any one time by 2010. By February 2009, that target had been exceeded, with almost 10,300 people undertaking apprenticeships. That represented an increase of 77 per cent over two years.

The Minister introduced contingency arrangements last December to counter the recession, to ensure that apprentices in the construction, engineering and

automotive sectors could complete their training even if they were made redundant.

Furthermore the new “Skillsafe” scheme will make up to £6 million available for the training of apprentices who are on short-time working.

These measures are all to be welcomed, as the young Apprentices currently being trained are will form the backbone of our skilled work-force in the years to come.”

ENDS