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# FE Week

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### WorldSkills 2017: High praise from first skills minister to visit in eight years

**Billy Camden** | 10:42, Oct 16, 2017 0



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FE Week asks: Neil Bentley on the vital role of WorldSkills



Team UK all set for WorldSkills 2017 in Abu Dhabi



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minister has the WorldSkills Abu Dhabi to make it her bid to "break down barriers" and "bridge the gap between the UK and the rest of the world".

As the first UK to compete in the global competition in 18 years, Bentley said all her dreams would be able to spread what she has learned back in the UK.

She said she will play by taking a stand where WorldSkills stands where the most skilled young people from 58 other countries are battling the competition.

From left: WorldSkills UK chair Carole Stott, Anne Milton, and WorldSkills UK chief executive Dr Neil Bentley at the addressing stand of WorldSkills Abu Dhabi.

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family of the competitors to get a feel of what the event is all about.

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Speaking at a media event after the tour, the minister said: "I have heard a lot about WorldSkills but like many things, you can be told about it but it is not until you get here and see it in action. I had no real perception of the enormity of it and so to

and I am dipping in the end of what has been an enormous programme of work.

and see their pride in their children. It is also the diversity of skills that are tested – landscape gardening, horticulture, jewellery making and the rest, and if I were going to take something away from this it would be to bottle what I have picked up here in a little pot and spread it around the UK."

WorldSkills Abu Dhabi has come at a critical time for the UK given prime minister Theresa May's new skills agenda. But for WorldSkills UK, the organisation that runs skills competitions for our country, funding has been squeezed by half in the last four years.



Anne Milton speaking with parents and supporters of Team UK competitors at WorldSkills Abu



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“One of the reasons I am here is because I don’t think it has ever been higher on a government’s priority,” she said. “Of course we face quite tight financial times, but this is critical not only for economic prosperity. It is about the country and all of that talent amongst young people that we are not able to use.”

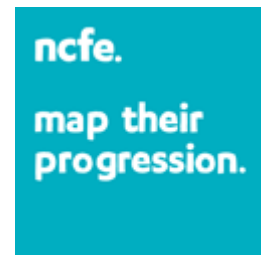
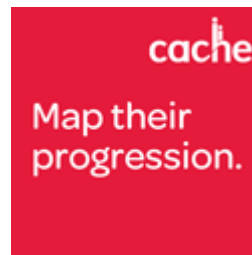
*FE Week* also asked if she believes investing in skills competitions is a good use of apprenticeship levy funds for employers and providers.

“I think this is quite an interesting time,” she replied. “We set up the apprenticeships levy and introduced the Institute for Apprenticeships so this is a brand new system and we want to make sure the money is well spent. We also need to keep open-minded about what it is spent on, what will lever in the best value for learners and get the best skills.”

She added that she will always remain “open-minded” about what to spend levy cash on, because “we are growing a new way of doing things”.

“I think this reform has been very different from anything we have ever done before,” she continued. “What we have done is keep an open mind as we

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Anne Milton discussing the fine work that goes into preparing a competitor for WorldSkills with Team UK jewellery expert Steven Jinks

go along, it is a new system and we will adapt and shift to make sure that the levy money and any government money is getting maximum value.”

Lastly, Ms Milton said the UK is “absolutely not good enough at spreading the benefits of skills competitions.”

“If I could put in a bottle essence of this competition and sprinkle it around the UK when all my dreams would be answered,” she said.

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