

Education Secretary visits world-leading research centre

Today (20 August) Education Secretary Gavin Williamson visited the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) where cutting edge technology is being used to drive innovations in manufacturing as well as offering training and apprenticeships in a range of crucial fields.

Since his appointment, Mr Williamson has made clear that technical education and training has played second fiddle to traditional academic options for too long, and as the first Education Secretary to personally take charge of this brief, he will make sure it is a priority for this Government.

On the visit the Education Secretary took a tour of the AMRC, which is based in Sheffield, including Factory 2050, a state of the art facility that sees partners like Boeing and McLaren Automotive, as well as smaller local employers using advanced technologies like robotics and virtual reality to develop innovative manufacturing techniques.

The centre also provides high-quality apprenticeship training and higher education in engineering and manufacturing designed to deliver the skills top firms like Boeing need to compete globally.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson, said:

It is absolutely vital that we continue to grow the nations' skills particularly in key areas like science, technology, engineering and maths so we have a workforce that is fit for the future. I am focused on making sure this is a priority area for this Government.

I've been hugely impressed by what I have seen here today at the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. What they are doing here at is a brilliant example of how one of our top universities is collaborating with global firms like Boeing as well as smaller employers to boost skills and jobs across the region.

I would like to see more collaborations like this across the country.

On the visit Mr Williamson met with University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre apprentices who work in local companies and Boeing's European production facility in Sheffield, seeing first-hand how their training is giving them the skills they need to forge great careers in the region.

He also tried out some of the impressive technologies on show at the AMRC, including augmented and virtual reality simulations, and learned about a project to help small and medium enterprises by retrofitting them with low-

cost digital technologies.

Boeing opened its production facility in Sheffield in 2018 – the company's first manufacturing site in Europe. The £40 million, 6,200-square-metre facility, employs 70 people, more than 30 of which are apprentices. It offers high quality apprenticeship opportunities through the University of Sheffield AMRC Training Centre in machining and technical support including at advanced, higher, degree and postgraduate levels apprenticeships.

Professor Koen Lamberts, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, said:

We were delighted to show the Education Secretary how our outstanding research translates into world class manufacturing capabilities and how we are working with our industrial and regional partners to develop the skills that businesses need.

We were particularly pleased to show the full breadth of what we have to offer – including apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships and undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses – and how they all contribute to an evolving education ecosystem.

Chris Greaves, Head of the Integrated Manufacturing Group at the University of Sheffield AMRC welcomed the Education Secretary to Factory 2050, telling him it is the place where digital meets manufacturing, helping companies de-risk and adopt Industry 4.0 technologies.

Chris Greaves said:

We are very grateful for the Secretary of State's support on apprenticeships. Our success is down to our people and apprentices are very much key to that for us. We've been delighted with the apprentices that have come to us through the AMRC Training Centre.

To invest more heavily in apprenticeships – to get the right skill sets into manufacturing – is not only important to us and the region but it's very important to the UK economy and manufacturing as a whole.

The Education Secretary also visited Grace Owen Nursery School in Sheffield, part of the Park Hill Estate, one of the city's most disadvantaged areas.

As a maintained nursery school, Grace Owen receives supplementary funding from the Department for Education in recognition of the role it plays supporting some of the most disadvantaged children in the country. Nearly 40 per cent of the children who attend Grace Owen are eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium, compared to the national average of 11.4%.

The government announced an additional investment, worth £24 million, for

maintained nursery schools in February, giving them certainty for the 2019-20 academic year, ahead of a Spending Review.

Mr Williamson met with headteacher Nancy Farrow and nursery staff to discuss their work to engage with families in the estate and surrounding area.

The Education Secretary added:

Children only get one chance at a good education. This must start in the very earliest years because a child's development at age five can determine their chances later in life, which is why we are investing £3.5 billion in our early education entitlements this year alone.

I'm grateful to the dedicated staff at Grace Owen Nursery for the important work they do in giving children the best start and putting them on a path to succeed.