

## BILL RAMMELL'S VISIT - continued

a country which is heir to a tradition of learning and culture stretching far back before the shores of Britain had been touched by anything approaching civilisation.

We are here to do business. Educational business, training business, skills business. To build partnerships, and exchange contracts - from which both sides should benefit.

We are here because some six months ago King Abdullah and my Prime Minister, Tony Blair, agreed that the education and training relationship between our two Kingdoms was not as good as it should be, and that Rammell should be sent out here to see what more could be done.

In two days, I have seen and heard much: from King Abdullah himself, from an impressive range of impressive Ministers, from policy-makers and opinion-formers, from teachers and administrators. All of us on the delegation have learnt that Saudi Arabia's story is both more interesting and more attractive than outside commentators with strong views but little knowledge like to suggest. We have seen for ourselves the strongly positive trends in all areas - political, social and economic - of national development.

We have seen too how you undersell yourselves, and fail to tell your story not just to the West but to each other as well. And we have seen too how, with a huge and growing population of young people, you have still so much to do.

Which is where we come in. Which is why I am more convinced than ever that Britain's mix of educational services and style matches more closely than ever your requirements, not just this year or next, not just in the Eastern Province or in oil and gas, but across the Kingdom and for the long haul. Not because we in Britain have all the answers, or have not made mistakes. But because our experiences in the struggle to equip our young people for the modern globalising workplace tracks so closely with what you are trying to do.

Why do I say this?

I say it because my experts tell me that, by 2020, two thirds of the jobs in Britain will require workers with higher level qualifications, that is workers qualified at technician level and above. And about half our jobs will be in occupations demanding university graduates. As you seek to reduce your dependence on foreign labour, especially foreign skilled labour, your needs are going closely to match ours.

I say it also because of the work we have done to develop vocational training in the UK. Our aim is that every Briton aged 18 or under should be in education, or in vocational training, or in a job with a strong training element. This year more than a quarter of a million young Britons should be working with employers in training Apprenticeships.

And, to identify and refine the skills that industry needs us, we have the Skills for Business network, with 25 Sector Skills Councils covering all the major areas of economic activity. In this, as you will understand, employers are and must be in

the driving seat, telling the deliverers what they need. Our Sector Skills Council covering Oil and Gas extraction, for example, has been particularly praised for its work on developing health and safety on the oil and gas rigs across the North Sea.

I say it too because, in Britain as here, we are having to recognise that learning doesn't stop when a student passes out of the school gate or through the college arch. As my Ministerial title suggests, in the modern society, with a rapidly accelerating velocity of change, learning is - and must be - for life.

And I say it finally because of the strong and strengthening record of educational exchange and co-operation between our two Kingdoms. Today, there are some three thousand young Saudis at British universities, many of them taking advantage of our tailor-made UK4 undergraduate degree course with a foundation year for those without A Levels, or the New Route PhD mixing academic and practical work. Among them are several hundred young Aramcons, showing Saudi Aramco's belief in British training excellence. All this is good, but not good enough.

Just as my Ministry is planning this year a dramatic increase in funding for advanced study of the Arab world at British universities, so I hope more Saudis will benefit from what I believe is now the best education system in the world.

Already, there are many partnerships. GOTEVOT looks now to Britain for the bench-marking of its training provision. Two of Britain's leading training providers - City and Guilds, and Edexcel - are actively developing vocational training frameworks for Saudi clients. Good, but not yet good enough.

At a local level, Saad Hospital here, and the University of Ulster, for example. Or plans for a nursing college in Jeddah working with Queen Margaret College in Edinburgh. Again, good, but not good enough.

Saudi Arabia's finest university - your own KFUPM - has many links with British universities and research centres. So does SABIC. So does the Jubail Industrial College. Good, but not good enough.

So, I hope you will not mind my saying that together we need to raise our game. For many of you, baseball will mean more than cricket. So, I hope you will know what I mean when I say that working separately we will never get to first base. But working together there will be no limit to the home runs - or, in cricket, centuries - that we can score.

Britain and Arabia, Arabia and Britain, have much in common. Including our love of sayings and proverbs.

And, like you, we say in English that one cannot clap with one hand: al-yad al-wahda la tasafik.

Nowhere is that more true than training and education. Let's clap together, for we surely cannot clap separately.