

Skills Minister Jacqui Smith speech at Parliamentary reception for WorldSkills UK

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Skills Minister Jacqui Smith delivers a speech at a Parliamentary reception for WorldSkills UK, 19 October 2026.

It's a real pleasure and an honour to be here today and to be able to welcome colleagues and partners, employers, educators, family members and most importantly, Team UK here to Parliament.

It's a brilliant opportunity to celebrate your enormous success at WorldSkills Shanghai. When I met up with the team in advance of the welcoming ceremony in Shanghai, I could see a few nerves about what was to come.

But overwhelmingly, what I felt was that you were an enormously well-prepared and ready to go group of people.

And seeing you all walking out as part of that amazing opening ceremony was brilliant. I was very proud. You may have seen me standing up and clapping loudly and enthusiastically. It was a brilliant opening ceremony, wasn't it? Notwithstanding being slightly spooked by the sight of those robots dancing with those ballerinas! Clearly the way of the future, and thank goodness that we've got you Peter and Pratham to take forward our robotic skills as well.

You did so well, as a team. Simply earning a place in Team UK is a remarkable achievement and reflects years of hard work and dedication and resilience. In Shanghai you demonstrated the very best of UK technical and vocational education, competing against the world's most talented young people and winning.

This year's competition was particularly significant because you, Team UK, delivered our best WorldSkills performance in almost a decade. And that's testament to your talent and your determination and professionalism, and also to the strength of the UK's skills system.

Every competitor should be immensely proud, regardless of the medal or the result achieved, because success at WorldSkills is about excellence, growth, and representing your country on a global stage.

As others have said though, I'd also like to recognise all of those people who helped you to make that possible. Your training managers and technical experts. The colleges, training providers and universities that are training and supporting you. The employers who invested in talent development. And I'm sure as well your families and friends who would have given you unwavering support for all those months and years when you were focused on what is necessary in order to achieve the sort of excellence that you have achieved.

Medals are brilliant. But WorldSkills is about more than medals as well. It allows us to benchmark ourselves against the very best in the world. It helps us identify and adopt international best practice. It raises standards across education, training and industry throughout the UK. And the

skills represented by Team UK are vital to our country's future as well, helping to drive economic growth, supporting innovation and productivity, building the workforce that our industries need for the future. And by competing at this level, you're also inspiring the next generation to pursue technical education, apprenticeships and skilled careers.

You'll have heard, I hope, the Prime Minister talking about how important it is that we provide the focus and the resource and the importance to technical and vocational education and you're the manifestation of that.

Shanghai also highlighted the importance of international collaboration and learning. And I'm pleased that we are going to be able to continue this collaboration with China following that recent visit. There'll be a UK-China Education Summit on the 24 and 25 November 2026 in Beijing, to continue the ministerial dialogue that I began with my counterparts whilst in Beijing and Shanghai.

International engagement of this kind help strengthen educational partnerships, share expertise, and create opportunities for future collaboration.

As we celebrate today, I hope that every member of Team UK reflects on what you've achieved. You represented the United Kingdom with distinction. You demonstrated excellence on the world stage and you helped to secure Britain's strongest WorldSkills result for nearly 10 years.

So on behalf of the government, can I thank you for everything that you've achieved and for being outstanding ambassadors for UK skills. Congratulations once again to Team UK and you thoroughly deserve to enjoy today's celebration. Thank you.

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