**Press Release**

*9th February 2016 – for immediate release*

**New initiative aims to close the Skills Gap in Cambridge**

A new digital platform which aims to close the skills gap in Cambridge launches this week. Step Up provides a way for schools and businesses to connect so that young people learn about the opportunities in the region and develop the skills that will help them move from education into employment.

The portal, [**www.timetostepup.co.uk**](http://www.timetostepup.co.uk), has been developed by Cambridge Ahead together with local schools and the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP). Step Up is a brokerage service where businesses can post opportunities such as work experience and jobs fairs, and where schools and students can make requests for speakers, site visits and work placements.

Cambridge’s economy is growing fast but attracting and retaining staff with the right skills is a challenge. At the same time, young people are investing heavily in higher education often with little idea of what employment opportunities might follow. There is also a group of young people who lack inspiration or direction and are at risk of failing to find employment altogether. The new service is expected to help address these issues and will be launched at Form the Future’s Education & Skills conference at the University Technical College in Cambridge on Thursday 11th February.

“Many employers in Cambridge struggle to recruit young people with the right skills and the skills shortage can act as a brake on business growth. Step Up will give us the platform to increase the connections between schools and businesses so we can help young people see the opportunities on their doorstep,” said Jane Paterson-Todd, CEO of Cambridge Ahead.

Step Up will be managed by Form the Future, the social enterprise that has been chosen to deliver the skills programme in the Cambridge area for the Greater Cambridge City Deal and GCGP LEP.

“We know that when businesses and schools work together, young people gain so much in the way of careers awareness, skills and motivation. We run a busy programme of events and activities like mentoring and work experience but as the demand from schools grows we need a system to help us deliver. Step Up will allow us to expand our activities and engage with many more businesses and more schools,” said Anne Bailey, Director of Form the Future.

The site was designed and developed by award-winning Onespacemedia who are themselves involved in education, supporting students at Anglia Ruskin University and offering regular work placements to younger students with an interest in web design.

James Cotton, Founder and CEO of Onespacemedia said, “Providing the opportunity for young people to get hands-on experience of different professions and industries is critical for the success of UK business. Inspiring children at early age helps them to make more informed educational choices as they prepare for their future careers. Businesses in turn benefit from a generation of young people who are better prepared for work as they enter the job market. The opportunities for digital technology to facilitate the connections between education and business are greater than ever before and I am thrilled that Onespacemedia was given the responsibility of bringing the Step Up platform to life.”

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**Notes to Editors:**

**About Cambridge Ahead**

Cambridge Ahead is a business and academic member group dedicated to the successful growth of Cambridge and its region in the long term. Our vision is for Cambridge to be the pre-eminent, small city in the world. The group now has 38 full Members who represent a current working population of over 36,000 people in Cambridge and a turnover of over £5billion. For more information visit [www.cambridgeahead.co.uk](http://www.cambridgeahead.co.uk)

**About Form the Future**

Form The Future is a social enterprise which grew out of a project run by Cambridge Area 14-19 Partnership (the state secondary schools and colleges) which addressed local businesses’ concerns about students’ lack of preparedness for work. Form the Future has been set up to better connect schools and businesses. For more information, visit [www.formthefuture.org.uk](http://www.formthefuture.org.uk)