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SUMMER 09

FORMER CABINET MINISTER PRAISES UNITY'S PROJECTS

It's full marks for retraining

James Purnell, the ex-works and pensions secretary, has seen for himself Unity's pioneering approach to retraining members.

His visit to Stoke-on-Trent on March 25 began at the Hanley JobCentrePlus. Mr Purnell then went on to

Steelite International in Burslem where Unity is working with management to provide help and advice to members made redundant, so as to get them back to work as soon as possible.

The former minister then dropped in at the "Learn a Trade" project at Burslem, which has been organised by Unity for redundant members to learn building and plumbing skills.

His whistle-stop tour ended with a visit to Unity head office where he had discussions with general secretary Geoff Bagnall and assistant general secretary Garry Oakes. They took the opportunity to talk to him about government assistance for the ceramic industry.

After his visit to Stoke, Mr Purnell said: "I was struck by the can-do attitude of people

who want to make sure they come out of the current problems we are facing stronger than they are now."

Effective

Earlier, in the House of Commons, Mr Purnell had praised Unity's efforts in



James Purnell (right) with Steelite International's head of manufacturing operations Rob Thompson during his visit to the Burslem company.

retraining its members. He told MPs: "Workers' groups around the UK should follow the example of Unity, which runs a pro-

gramme to retrain members. Unity's work had been particularly effective in helping staff who lost jobs at Wedgwood because the union discussed future options with members before they became redundant.

"It is pioneering an approach in which it brings together its own money for investing in training with money from the regional development agency and from Job Centre Plus."

A video of the former minister's visit to the city has been posted on YouTube to promote the help that the government is providing to people trying to get back to work. The video was also shown in the Political Slot on Channel

Four on April 6. To see the YouTube video clip go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx5bFLhfZkE>

More jobs to go at Wedgwood

Unity was shocked to learn in May that Wedgwood has declared over 200 further redundancies.

The Wedgwood, Royal Doulton and Waterford Crystal brands have been bought by the New York-based private equity company KPS.

Wedgwood has also indicated that yet more production will move off-shore, probably to the Far East.

Unity general secretary Geoff Bagnall said: "In Unity's view this is a grave mistake. If the company is to have a future then it should continue to produce all its products in Staffordshire with a Stoke-on-Trent back stamp."

● *Unity is pursuing legal claims for a protective award against Wedgwood following its move into administration in January. It has also started similar legal action against the Denby Pottery Company following a management buyout of the Derbyshire manufacturer.*