

Young workers hone skills in quest for gold



Olympic challenge: Gillian Shephard, the employment secretary, meets young bricklayers, chefs, hairdressers and plumbers from a team of 30 representing the United Kingdom at an international Skills Olympics this summer.

The youngsters, aged between 19 and 22, talked with Mrs Shephard at the National Training Awards ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre in London yesterday. She wished them luck for the event in Taiwan in July.

The team will compete against young people from 25 other countries. The winners will be awarded gold, silver and bronze medals to mark their achievements. Mrs

Shephard described the team as a "beacon for the future". She added: "These young men and women are a shining example of what can be achieved by personal commitment to training and self-improvement."

The national teams will compete in up to 40 occupational skills, including car repairs, carpentry, electronics, hairdressing, jewellery, plumbing and welding.

The youngsters are being sponsored by their various industries, and come from every English region as well as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

□ A 16-page special supplement is published with *The Times* today.