**Speech by Professor Nick Petford at House of Lords Event to Launch the UK Leather Strategy**

Thank you Kishwer and Reg for leaving me so little to say. I would particularly like to add my welcome to the many University alumni and Corium Club members who are present here this evening.

And to echo the words spoken already about the importance of all of us here tonight continuing to support the UK leather industry as it implements its strategy.

Size doesn’t necessarily matter. It is what you do with what you have got that is important. Our industry is small but is and will continue to be a global leader in delivering high quality, efficient and effective tanning and manufacturing, which is environmentally sustainable and can evidence commitment to continuing to reduce its carbon footprint – not just from cradle to grave but the full life cycle, from cradle to cradle.

You would expect me to personally champion the importance of education, research and development in this mix. And I would just like to take two minutes to remind us all of the contribution of the University of Northampton to the past, current and future success of the UK leather industry. The University and its forbears have delivered high quality education and training in leather technology, in Northampton, for over one hundred years. The Institute for Creative Leather Technologies builds on this tradition and descends directly from the Leathersellers’ Technical College which was established in Bermondsey in 1809. The Leathersellers’ Company continues to this day to be a key strategic partner and sponsor of the Institute, for which we remain indebted to the Company. Thank you, Master.

Under the outstanding leadership and direction of Dr Mark Wilkinson, who I am delighted to say is here with us this evening, the Institute’s reputation has gone from strength to strength in recent years. Important links with the industry have been re-forged. The facilities have benefitted from an £800,000 investment, co-financed with the Leathersellers’ Company, and now offer students, the industry and researchers a state of the art ‘model tannery’. Further University investment in a new research laboratory means we have an outstanding, fully equipped new facility ready for the start of the 2011 academic year.

People are our most important asset. The ICLT staff team has been reshaped to ensure that not only current but future industry needs are met. Its body of knowledge and expertise is unparalleled anywhere in the world. Its research activities combine fundamental long-term studies with ‘closer to market’ ideas which can be exploited in industry.

The Institute is leading the way for the University in the development of novel and innovative modes of course delivery to meet the professional development and employment needs of the industry, and to achieve value for money. The Institute’s product offer has been completely repositioned for 2011, in consultation and collaboration with the industry, to meet changing educational and industry needs and aspirations. We now offer a much wider range of world leading high quality programmes and courses.

The University will continue to support and collaborate with the UK industry in all areas of the new strategy, and in particular, all aspects of research and development, education and training.

Thanks to all of you, and to Mark and his team, we have a world leading industry – education collaboration. The outputs of which are adding tremendous value to the UK leather sector. Long may that continue.