

Business Briefing

ISSUE 4: WINTER 2009

EAST MIDLANDS

Launch of Apprenticeships Matching Service



Gareth Xavier
apprentice electrician
with Goodmarrlott &
Hursthouse Ltd.

The web-based National Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service (NAVMS) is preparing for its external launch in April.

A free recruitment and matching service for Apprenticeships will allow potential candidates to search and apply for earning and learning opportunities with employers and training providers.

Nick Rashley, the Apprenticeships lead for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in the East Midlands, said: "The service is specially designed to help employers, training providers and candidates fill vacancies in an informed and efficient way. It will keep everyone up to date and in the loop – all in one place."

Integral

The system will be launched in April as an integral part of the National Apprenticeships Service (NAS) which is to be launched at the same time. Meantime, potential candidates looking for vacancies and information can now access the system by going to: www.apprenticeships.org.uk

All Apprenticeship vacancies have been uploaded on to the system. The system will include a vast database of interested candidates and a national profile of Apprenticeship opportunities.

Access to an interactive My Apprenticeship Space will allow employers to save links and relevant information in one area for ease of access. Similarly candidates will be able to save information, and receive updates and alerts.

Other benefits to employers include:

- links to their own recruitment websites
- flexibility of involvement regarding holding contracts and managing vacancy matching activities
- candidate application details can be exported to enable sifting and integration with existing HR systems.

Parents will also be able to access the latest information and Q & As on how they can help their sons and daughters to access Apprenticeships.

Nick said: "The service will help meet the aspiration to increase the number of apprentices nationwide to 400,000 by 2020 as set out in the national strategy 'World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All.'

"We want to see one in five of all 16-18 year-olds enrolled on an Apprenticeship before the end of the academic year in 2019/20. Apprenticeships are now open to non-graduate adults from the ages of 19 to retirement age."

The overarching NAS will complement the skills brokerage service, work with employers from initial interest to progression and support careers guidance staff in schools and colleges. It will also manage relationships with other stakeholders such as local authorities and sector skills councils.

Apprenticeships on the increase

Apprenticeships starting up in the East Midlands during the year ending July 2008 have risen by 19.3 per cent. "This is a fantastic increase and shows just how valuable Apprenticeships are to both employers and learners," Nick Rashley said.

Other figures for the year show:

- a 12.3 per cent increase in 16-18 year olds starting Apprenticeships compared to the national trend of a 2.2 per cent increase.
- 19+ Apprenticeship start volumes grew by 39% in 2007/08
- 22 per cent of all adult Apprenticeships are aged 25 and over.

See our special four-page Apprenticeships supplement for more details about NAVMS

Minister for the East Midlands, Phil Hope, during a recent visit to firms in the region that have invested in training.



Public sector organisations urged to sign Skills Pledge

Public sector organisations in the East Midlands are being urged to ensure that their staff have the right skills to become more effective and efficient when delivering services to the communities they serve.

Speaking at the recent launch of the East Midlands Public Sector Skills Challenge at Leicester's Walkers Stadium, Minister for the East Midlands Phil Hope praised a number of organisations that have already signed a public sector skills pledge, and called on others to do the same. In the East Midlands, Leicester City Council and the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust are amongst the organisations leading the way by signing the Government's Skills Pledge – a public commitment to supporting the skills development of all their employees to a minimum of NVQ Level 2 (the equivalent of five good GCSEs).

According to Phil Hope, as the region's largest employer – with a workforce of more than half a million people – the public sector has a key role to play in enhancing the skills of the current and future workforce.

"By 2010 the region's public sector is going to need 60,000 more skilled recruits than it had in 2004," he continued. "To achieve this, I want employers to ensure as many of their staff as possible have a Level 2 qualification; increase the proportion of young adults under 25 employed in public services by 25 per cent with 4,000 new Apprenticeships across the region; and recruit 5,000 unemployed local people into entry level and essential occupations."

"The Leicestershire services that have already signed up to the Skills Pledge are clearly demonstrating the importance of their investment in the development of their staff, the quality of their service and the prosperity of their local communities. I'd urge other public sector organisations across the East Midlands to lead the way for other employers by fulfilling the Government's Skills Pledge."

Added Tom Crompton, regional director for the LSC East Midlands: "Skills are vitally important for individuals, for their future employability and for the success of organisations throughout the UK."

Links between businesses and colleges

The Government has announced plans to help businesses to boost profits and improve their competitiveness by accessing the specialist expertise of further education colleges and training providers.

Further Education Minister Sion Simon says the East Midlands will be home to one of five pilots across the UK that will build direct links between businesses and experts, facilities and resources in colleges and the wider further education (FE) sector.

Backed with £2.5 million from the Government's FE Specialisation and Innovation Fund, the pathfinder projects aim to build FE capacity to help firms access the extra support they need to improve their business processes, develop new products and services and move into new markets.

Commented Sion Simon: "I want to transform the FE system so that business innovation is a key part of the sector's mission. Many FE colleges and training providers have already developed outstanding relationships with the business community, delivering high-quality training and qualifications in partnership with local employers. But there is huge untapped potential not just to meet skills needs, but to drive innovation, helping firms get ahead and remain viable over the long term."

In the East Midlands, West Nottinghamshire College is leading an Innovation in Sustainable Construction initiative bringing together a wide range of employer associates and a number of university partners, as well as eight FE colleges.

The pathfinder will encourage sustainable development in construction by developing FE capacity to provide consultancy, advice and support to firms within the construction and civil engineering sector.

Added Sion Simon: "The pilots will play a vital role in showing how FE can boost the performance of local firms, helping them stay competitive in tough times, while helping shape a new and exciting agenda for the entire FE sector."

TRUSTS INVEST IN THE FUTURE TO IMPROVE THEIR SERVICES

Two regional health trusts are leading the way when it comes to improving services through investment in staff development.

The East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EMAS) recently became the first ambulance service in the country to sign up to the Skills Pledge by promising to help all of its employees to develop their basic skills.

It has also signed up to the Joint Investment Framework (JIF) for Health in the East Midlands, a £100 million initiative that aims to deliver skills, learning and qualifications to improve patient care and the delivery of NHS services across the region. The JIF follows a national agreement between Strategic Health Authorities, the LSC and Skills for Health.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to bridge a future skills gap, Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust is embarking upon an ambitious Apprenticeship programme to recruit 20 new

Apprenticeships within one year after making the Skills Pledge.

The Trust's Apprenticeships will give people from all walks of life the chance to earn while they learn and work towards recognised qualifications.

Explained Beverley Edwards, the Trust's diversity lead: "By 2010, 40 per cent of the workforce will be over the age of 45 and, by 2025 half of the adult population will be aged 50 or over.

"This change means the Trust will be facing a skills shortage in the coming years and by opening up Apprenticeships to under-represented groups we can address this issue and begin to help close the skills gap."

Apprenticeships are available in almost every



Carla Collett is one of the first apprentices to be taken on by Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust after the organisation signed the Skills Pledge.

area of employment within the Trust. The first candidate to be appointed on the Trusts programme is 17 year-old Carla Collett who has joined the Trust's HR department on a two-year Apprenticeship. Carla will receive all her training 'on the job' supported by provider JHP Group Ltd.



RSPCA becomes 1,000th Employer in the region to make the Pledge

An animal welfare charity in Derbyshire is set to become the 1,000th organisation in the East Midlands to make the Government's Skills Pledge.

The RSPCA centre in Chesterfield is also hoping to solve its volunteer crisis by making the pledge and through funding from the LSC's Train to Gain service. Currently, the branch is running on less than half the number of animal care volunteers it needs but hopes to boost numbers by offering free NVQ training.

Explained Julie Ward, Chesterfield RSPCA branch manager: "Lots of people contact us to volunteer, but fall away. The Skills Pledge allows us to offer volunteers free NVQ training to encourage them to stick around. Our volunteers are interested in animal welfare; now they can take it a stage further and maybe even turn their past-time into a career."

Sue Peake, skills development director, LSC East Midlands added: "Making the Skills Pledge shows a commitment to training employees – whether they are on the payroll or not. Chesterfield RSPCA is a great example of how the Pledge is helping them access free and subsidised training courses that can lead to nationally recognised qualifications."

For more information about making the Skills Pledge speak to a skills broker on 0800 015 55 45 or go to <http://inourhands.lsc.gov.uk>

Providing skills solutions to small business

A package of help – including £350 million for training initiatives – has been announced by the Government in a bid to boost small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) struggling with the effects of the economic downturn.

The funding will come from the **Train to Gain** service, which is scheduled to grow to £1 billion by 2011, and Skills Secretary John Denham said: "Small businesses are an important engine of our economy and we must make sure that we support them during tough economic times.

"We are overhauling the training system to make sure that SMEs can get help with training their staff with the very minimum of bureaucracy. We know that firms which invest in skills do better than those that don't which is why we will be urging small businesses to take up this offer." LSC East Midlands' regional director Tom

Crompton said: "Under **Train to Gain**, we are already delivering a dedicated range of services specifically designed to meet the requirements of all companies – irrespective of their size and sector.

Skills Challenges

"Now we'll be able to do even more for the SME sector – helping them to meet the skills challenges they face in an extremely demanding economic climate."

Train to Gain is a broadly-based service portfolio which includes not only support and advice on recruitment, training and qualifications, but also

on potential sources of funding to help carry through bespoke skills action plans.

Key elements of the new package include:

- Relaxing the rules to allow funding for 'bite-sized chunks' – small units or modules of qualifications in key areas such as business improvement, customer service, team-working and risk management;
- Help for groups of SMEs which might be located together on business parks;
- Extending the current leadership and management programme so more SMEs can benefit – including those with between five and 10 workers;
- Relaxing rules to allow workers to get more training up to Level 2 and providing more funding for Level 3 training.

Tom added: "The aim of **Train to Gain** is to put companies in touch with the most appropriate organisation to deal with their skills needs, ensuring they have named contacts who will be responsible for developing an on-going relationship."

MATALAN STAFF CHECK OUT TRAINING

One of the UK's largest retailers, has attributed an increase in productivity and staff retention to its latest training programme delivered by Derby College with the help of funding from Train to Gain.

The college has worked with Lancashire-based Matalan Retail Ltd for over two years to upskill its general sales assistants across the



More than 600 Matalan staff have benefited from Train to Gain.

company's 198 stores nationwide. So far, more than 600 staff have completed NVQ Level 2 qualifications with nearly 200 due to complete theirs within the next few months.

Julie Blomley, Matalan's human resources controller, said: "I believe it's vital for every business to offer career development opportunities to its workforce as it helps boost staff morale and staff retention. Derby College has been a delight to work with over the last two years. They always provide a professional and efficient service, which has helped make this major training programme much easier to coordinate.

"But none of this would be possible without funding from the LSC's Train to Gain service, which has enabled us to focus our training budget in other areas of need."

The course covers all areas of store operations and are delivered in-store on an individual basis over a six-month period. One employee, Perry Kelly, 22, who is completing an NVQ Level 2 in retail skills, said: "Since starting my qualification I have a much better understanding of the retail sector and the course has helped me a lot in my own work. When I started I was working part-time but I have now been made up to a full-time position on the menswear department. My knowledge has improved in all areas particularly merchandising and sales."

Kath Schofield, corporate director at Derby College, said: "Coordinating training for so many people has been a challenge for our team, but has been incredibly rewarding. The Matalan staff are eager to learn and their job roles and responsibilities are perfect for the qualifications we deliver."

Successful Second Anniversary for Flagship Training Service

Nearly 7,000 East Midlands firms have already benefited from Train to Gain as the Government's flagship service celebrates its second anniversary.

In total 6,900 employers in the region receive training, and more than 41,500 learners have started a qualification with the help of more than £30 million.

An evaluation published this year revealed that some 43 per cent of people who had completed their training had received a pay rise and 30 per cent reported having had a promotion. Meanwhile 78 per cent of employers said they would recommend Train to Gain to other businesses.

Now employers across the East Midlands are joining the LSC to call on even more employers to take advantage of the training service in the light of the first two years progress.

Tony Belmega, regional director of skills, LSC

East Midlands said: "Many employers realise the value of up-skilling their workforce and that it is one of the most important things they can do to raise the value of their business and to 'future proof' themselves as best they can against the potential impact of the current credit crunch.

"Investing in the skills of their people will make it easier for employers to respond to economic challenges and also ensure they are well placed to take advantage of future growth opportunities. Now more than ever, employers need to make sure their staff are highly skilled and ready to face current economic challenges and I would urge other companies to emulate these successful organisations and to take advantage of the funding, advice and training on offer through the Train to Gain service."

Companies in the East Midlands that have benefited from Train to Gain include:

Allant Europe

A Nottingham-based European recruitment consultancy providing English and French speaking individuals to the construction, civil engineering and property markets that has dramatically changed how they plan and organise their time since using Train to Gain. As a result it has recorded an increase in profits of more than 20 per cent.

TNT Archive Services

The Swadlincote-based company offers secure off site storage at its purpose-built archiving facilities, worked with Loughborough College to put 80 staff through an NVQ Level 2 in information and library services, with training for a further 80 planned.

Divisional general manager Tim Robb said: "The training process has already been a huge success and our employees are gaining a lot from the training and are already able to use their new skills in their day-to-day work. We are delighted our first batch has come through with a 100 per cent pass rate!"

AGENCY MAINTAINS ITS COMPETITIVE EDGE

A Northampton-based construction recruitment agency is retaining its advantage over the competition thanks to Train to Gain.

GCS Construction, which supplies temporary staff to a wide range of companies on various construction projects around Northampton and Wellingborough, has been successfully running a series of NVQ training courses for its plant operators through Keith Cook Training Services.

A large percentage of major contractors' site safety regulations insist that all plant operators are licensed under the Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) and are 'competent operators'.

In order to qualify for a licence, an operator must first complete a CPCS training course and pass a test to become a 'trained operator'. Following this, they must enrol on and achieve the NVQ standard in plant operations at Level 2 to become a 'competent operator', without which they would be unable to work.

At GCS Construction, 10 people have completed the training in recent months. Commented Steve Coogan, GCS construction consultant: "With the invaluable financial support of Train to Gain and the flexibility of Keith Cook Training Services, we are able to provide the NVQ training to our plant operators for free.



Driver Vaniel Drumea with Steve Coogan from GCS Construction – one of the many firms benefitting from Train to Gain.

"Not only has this helped us keep good workers on our books, it has also improved our reputation for being committed to safety and training."

Continued Tony Belmega regional director of skills, LSC East Midlands: "Developing skills across the country is vital if we are to increase productivity, support advances in enterprise and innovation and improve our economic well being.

"It is not particularly common practice for a recruitment agency, such as GCS, to offer training to its workers, but the benefits of this approach for both the company's profits and its worker's careers are clear to see," he added.

Train to Gain to help people facing redundancy says the Chancellor

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has promised greater provision of pre-redundancy re-training through Train to Gain in his recent Pre-Budget Report.

He said the Government will also use the successful Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs) to reach the short-term unemployed as well as harder to reach groups.

In the House of Commons, Alistair Darling also announced a National Employment Partnership to tackle rising unemployment. This will be chaired by the Prime Minister and involve 20 large employers including Tesco, Centrica and Royal Mail.

"Partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and employers is already taking place at the local level through the Government's highly successful LEPs, in which employers commit to taking on the long-term unemployed," he explained. "Businesses report that, through LEPs, they have received a much improved recruitment service from Jobcentre Plus. To

date, over 70,000 people have found work through LEPs."

Expansion

He went on to say that the Government intends to significantly expand this successful approach of working with employers, through the National Employment Partnership which will include chief executives from across British business as well as the public sector.

"The Prime Minister will chair the Partnership's discussions of how employers will support the Government's efforts to help the rapid re-employment of people facing redundancy," continued the Chancellor.

He also reported that the Government has already put aside additional money over the next three years to support people faced with

redundancy and those looking for work. This additional funding will contribute to the further steps the Government is taking to strengthen pre-redundancy support, including extending Train to Gain programmes.

The report itself outlines plans for skills hubs – networks of local partners providing job brokerage services, training and other support in response to large-scale redundancies.

"The extension of Train to Gain will enable individuals to re-train before they are made redundant, to equip them with the skills to move swiftly into a new job," the Chancellor added.

Full details of the pre-budget report can be found at www.prebudget.treasury.gov.uk

B&Q MARKS NATIONAL MILESTONE

Home improvement retailer B&Q has become the 100,000th company in the UK to sign up to Train to Gain.

Nationally, since its launch in 2006, Train to Gain has helped over 570,000 employees in England get training, and over 291,000 learners have achieved a qualification.

What's more, funding for Train to Gain will increase from £520 million in 2007-08 to over £1 billion by 2010-11.

Commented Martyn Philips, HR director, B&Q: "Good skills at all levels are essential to our business if we are to continue to thrive in an exceptionally competitive market and we currently invest a lot of time and effort in ensuring our staff receive the training they need in order to be the best at their job.

"Train to Gain means we can now do this even better than before and helps us to really identify our employees' individual needs. Over the next 12 months we anticipate around 35 per cent of our non-management team members will be awarded the NVQ Retail Skills Level 2," he added.

Business Leaders warn against Training Cutbacks to Save Cash

The UK's most senior business and union leaders have joined forces in calling on the nation's employers not to slash staff training in a bid to cut costs.

In an open letter published in national newspapers they urged employers to sustain or even increase their investment in training, saying that now is precisely the time to keep investing in skills.

The letter continues: "It is the people we employ who will get us through. When markets are shrinking and order books falling, it is their commitment, productivity and ability to add value that will keep us competitive. Investing now in building new skills will put us in the strongest position as the economy recovers."

Those putting their name to the letter include Sir Mike Rake, chairman of BT group and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills; Sir Stuart Rose, chairman of Marks & Spencer and Business in the Community; Richard Lambert, director general of the CBI and Brendan Barber, general secretary of the TUC.

To find out more about how Train To Gain can help your business, call 0800 015 55 45 or visit www.traintogain.gov.uk

Regional Council will help shape the future of learning and skills in the East Midlands



Mark Blois, a member of the new regional council.

Mark Blois, a partner with the Midlands law firm Browne Jacobson, says the LSC's regional council has an important role to play in shaping the future of post-16 learning and skills in the East Midlands.

The vice chair of the Education Law Association was amongst 15 leading names from education and the public, private and voluntary sectors to be appointed to the council that will help drive forward the work of the LSC over the next two years.

Mark says he has already been impressed by the range of expertise offered by other members of the council and is looking forward to the challenges ahead. "I believe that the council provides the opportunity for employers to influence the future of training in the region," he explained.

"One of the biggest challenges we face is convincing employers not to cut back on training now that times are tough and that investing in skills can have a really positive impact on their bottom

line. This may not be immediately apparent but it is vital to success in the medium to long-term. It is also difficult to balance the many competing demands on resources available for education and training and this is where the combined expertise of the council members can really help to balance the needs of our many stakeholders."

Looking to the future Mark says the regional council will also play a key role in developing education and training for future generations in the East Midlands. "The means of delivering training is constantly changing and evolving but we can develop a strategy that help to provide the region with the skills it needs for years to come," he added.

To view the full list of regional council members go to www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/eastmidlands



Royal Visitor

The Lincolnshire town of Louth received a special visitor recently to mark the opening of a new college. Wolds College is one of eight projects totalling £5.8 million across the Lincolnshire Wolds being funded by the LSC and was officially opened by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal.

The college will deliver high quality teaching and learning for up to 200, 16 to 19-year-olds in the area and during her visit The Princess Royal enjoyed a tour of the facilities including the brickwork and plastering workshops; motor vehicle workshop and hairdressing and beauty therapy salons.

The Wolds College project has been made possible by a collaboration of partners which include schools accommodating 11-16 year-old and 11-18 year-old learners, special schools, further and higher education providers, local authorities, Connexions Lincolnshire and the local business community.

SECURITY FIRM HONoured FOR ITS COMMITMENT TO TRAINING

Almost 300 business and community leaders from across the East Midlands gathered at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Nottingham recently for the annual First Enterprise, Ethnic Minority Business Awards and Gala Dinner.

Amongst the award winners on the night was Lee Lindsay of Lindsay Security, who was presented with the Developing Business Excellence Through Their People Award, sponsored by the LSC East Midlands Train to Gain service.

Lindsay Security is an established business providing security guards for the leisure and

events industry. The skills of its staff have been nurtured and encouraged in the company's own accredited training centre with recognised qualifications for participants and the award judges paid tribute to Lee's strong leadership on training and his commitment to the professional development of those wanting to pursue a career as a security guard or door supervisor.

The Awards are now in their tenth year and recognise and reward achievement in the ethnic minority business community. Chairman Hassan Ahmed said this year there had been a record number of high quality entries.



Lee Lindsay of Lindsay Security receives the Developing Business Through Their People Award.



Matthew Amroliwala and Pete Waterman

Conference Hailed a Huge Success

Record producer Pete Waterman OBE, entrepreneur Emma Harrison and Tim Campbell, star of TV show *The Apprentice* were amongst the guest speakers at a recent business conference hosted by TV presenter Matthew Amroliwala supported by the LSC East Midlands and key partners.

Held at the East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham, the event has been hailed a huge success by both organisers and representatives from the regional business community who took part. Commented Michael Gore of Inspire Independence, one of the delegates at the conference: "As a national training provider it's a pleasure to be involved in such professional and informative meetings. We are extremely grateful for all the help and support we receive from the LSC East Midlands and continue to do all we can to support this region."

Other people who attended described the event as 'inspirational' and 'very worthwhile'. Added Tom Crompton, LSC East Midlands regional director: "We are delighted to have received so much positive feedback following the event which provided businesses in the region with the opportunity to network and share best practice. The programme of high calibre speakers and informative, lively seminars also ensured that every delegate left with new ideas and knowledge that could be transferred to their workplace."

Skills Accounts – a new East Mids trial

The East Midlands is one of just two regions currently trialling Skills Accounts through *nextstep* services and eight FE colleges.

Skills Accounts aim to give individuals more control of their learning, to help develop and improve their skills to ultimately support job entry and progression. Skills Accounts will last a lifetime and will be offered to all adults – in or out of work, whatever their skills level. Skills Accounts will put purchasing power into the learner's hands, offering a virtual voucher of funding, according to their entitlement, to purchase relevant learning at an accredited, quality assured provider of their choice.

For more information about Skills Accounts, click on to: www.direct.gov.uk/skillsaccounts

LSC SUPPORT FOR NEW LEARNING FACILITIES

Leicester College has opened its new £44 million Abbey Park campus with the help of a huge cash injection from the LSC.

The organisation contributed £22.9 million towards the cost of the project, which includes state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities as well as a redeveloped and refurbished specialist engineering facility.

The campus, which was opened in time for the start of the 2008-2009 academic year, also benefits from the installation of a wind turbine to help generate some of the electricity required by the new facility.

Meanwhile the LSC has also supported the development of a new equine veterinary practice and therapy centre at Moulton College, Northampton.



First class facilities at Moulton College's Equine Veterinary Practice and Therapy Centre.

The new £1.7m purpose-built facility was opened in September and will provide a 'one stop' package of care for the discerning horse owner. The centre effectively comprises three buildings in one, with an equine therapy centre, a specialist 'large animal' veterinary clinic and a teaching facility with three new classrooms.

The veterinary practice operates in partnership with Oakham Veterinary Hospital, whilst the therapy suite provides state-of-the-art facilities including a large hydrotherapy pool, aqua treadmill, spa and solarium.

This latest addition to the equestrian facilities at the college will provide not only first class care by professionals, but will also enhance the student experience by providing invaluable 'hands on' experience.