

## Here comes the entrepreneur

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Donna Marie Caldwell shrugged off the shock of redundancy to start her own business and claim honours in the North East women entrepreneur awards.

But despite this success – based on rapid growth of her L’amour operations – she has signed herself and her staff up for a series of business training courses.

The training is being delivered by ITEC North East, funded through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) North East.

“There’s always something more you can learn,” says Donna Marie, from Washington, who runs L’amour Bridal, Wedding Co-ordination, Event Management, L’amour Men and Curves by L’amour from Boldon Lane in South Shields.

“At first it was just me, working from home, cluttering up the place with swatches of material and half made bridal gowns everywhere but we now have our own premises and have already twice expanded into adjoining buildings.

“We have done well and moved into a number of new areas over the first couple of years but I know that the team needs the right skills to consolidate this growth and that’s why three of us are doing formal training.”

Donna Marie and Kath Young, who runs the bridal shop, are working towards NVQ Level 2 in IT while event manager Nicola Frain is taking an extra step and studying for an Apprenticeship in the same subject.

For Kath, 52 and from Jarrow, it's the last thing she expected to be doing, having taken early retirement from retail to look for a part time job: "I'm working harder than ever but I love it," she said: "And although I have not studied or taken an exam since my CSEs in 1970 I am really enjoying my course which is definitely helping me to do my job more effectively."

Nicola, 25 and from Whitley Bay, became aware of the L'amour businesses when working as an advertising sales representative and quit to join the company. She said: "Some people might question why I would leave a big, established firm to join a new venture but I just knew this business was going places."

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added: "It is encouraging to see that successful businesses like Donna Marie's still see the value of constantly developing skills through training to further improve their businesses performance.

"In the increasingly competitive and fast moving world of work, those who develop their people to motivate and help them embrace change, will create the most successful organisations."

Apprenticeships offer training for existing staff and new recruits in a wide range of areas. There are over 160 different courses offering relevant training designed by business for business. They learn while they work, so their knowledge is up-to-date and because their training is on the job, the practical skills they gain are the ones that are right for business.

To find out more about what an Apprenticeship could do for your organisation, call 0800 0150 400 or visit [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk)

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**Caption:**

Pictured left to right: Nicola Frain, Donna Marie and Kath Young

**Editor's Note:**

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

**Media contact:** Laura Tiplady or Ann Barnes, Regional Press Officers:

T: 0191 492 6355

E: [laura.tiplady@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:laura.tiplady@lsc.gov.uk) or [ann.barnes@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:ann.barnes@lsc.gov.uk)

Out of hours media contact Julie Calvert, Regional Marketing and Communications Manager at the LSC North East:

T: 07710075118