

Bosses of small firms lose out on holidays as staff unqualified to cover the work

Small employers see training as key to business success

Date of issue 20 July 2007

Publication number NWR-081

Two in five (41%) small business managers are failing to use their full holiday allowance, and of this figure, more than one in five employers (22%) cited unskilled staff as a major barrier, reveals research carried out on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) by FreshMinds.

The survey of nearly 500 SMEs also found that whilst nearly all small businesses surveyed (81%) recognise that training is the key to success, a staggering 43% admit that they should focus more on training. Of those employers, a quarter say that they don't have time to search for suitable training options, and one in five are bewildered by the range of training available.

Paul Holme, Regional Skills Director at the Learning and Skills Council in the North West, which manages the Train to Gain service, says:

"Getting skilled is key to our future as a nation in a global economy. It is also key to our future individually as the need to better our own skills is becoming even more evident as competition increases.

"That's why we've invested in Train to Gain, designed to drive up the nation's skills by tackling historic barriers to learning, such as cost and time. We want it to be as easy as possible for people to access information and understand what help is available for them to get the skills needed to get on in life and business".

A new advertising campaign launched this week will encourage employers to reap the business benefits of training their staff. This builds on the major national skills campaign launched on 9 July by the LSC and the newly formed Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). The campaign urges people to take control of their future by investing in skills, using the strapline, '*Our future. It's in our hands*'.

David Lammy, Minister for Skills in the new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills says:

"In launching a major new marketing campaign, we are responding to the challenge set out by Lord Leitch in his Review of Skills, to bring about a culture change in the nation's attitude to skills.

"Achieving our world class ambition means dramatically increasing the number of adults

who improve their skills and achieve qualifications each year, at all levels from functional literacy and numeracy to higher education levels. To deliver our ambition, we must forge a new partnership between government, employers and individuals, with each taking responsibility for increasing their action and investment.

“We need to dramatically raise awareness and aspirations on skills. We need employers to see the value of and the need to invest in skills at all levels. And we need individuals to pay more attention to and take action to address their skills needs”.

Train to Gain is designed to help businesses get the training they need to succeed and provides tailored, independent advice to businesses through a network of skills brokers - covering any issue from sourcing the right course or training provider to finding out if any funding exists.

One Cumbrian company which has recently enjoyed the benefits of using the Train to Gain service is Past Times Trading Ltd based in Workington. Past Times Trading wanted to improve the business by building on the practical skills of many of its customer service and warehouse operatives and to aid their development within the company and increase their confidence at work.

Fifteen staff participated in training through Train to Gain with the majority completing NVQ Level 2 in Warehousing and others completing NVQ Level 2 in Customer Service with Lakes College, part of the Cumbria Colleges Ltd consortium. As a result Past Times Trading Ltd is already noticing growth, particularly in terms of productivity, which has seen a dramatic increase over the last year alone. In addition the company has seen reduced levels of staff turnover, which it is directly attributed to the training. This has resulted in a committed, focused team that is brimming with confidence.

John Jackson, Warehouse Manager at Past Times Trading Ltd comments, “We are currently looking to develop more of the team using Train to Gain in the future as the service has had such a positive effect on the company. Staff can improve their skills and gain a nationally recognised qualification whilst working ensuring that our workforce becomes more skilled and motivated, which is all any employer could ask.”

For more information about Train to Gain, visit traintogain.gov.uk or call 0845 602 0062 to contact a Skills Broker.

For more information about the wider skills campaign, visit lsc.gov.uk/inourhands or call 0800 011 30 30.

Ends

The survey was conducted by FreshMinds, during May 2007. A total of 468 SMEs in England responded, where companies with less than ten employees were most prevalent. The companies were from the following sectors:

Retail: 114

Hospitality/travel/tourism: 101
Transport/automotive/logistics: 101
Manufacturing: 69
Construction: 51
Engineering: 32

Train to Gain:

Train to Gain is a new service from the Learning and Skills Council, to help businesses get the training they need to succeed. The cornerstone of Train to Gain is a free Skills Brokerage service that offers independent and impartial advice, matches training needs with training providers and ensures that training is delivered to meet employer's needs.

Train to Gain is important because skills shortages continue to have a negative impact on UK productivity and competitiveness in the face of fast-growing economies.

Train to Gain aims to encourage all businesses and individuals to value and realise the benefits that learning and skills can bring and to invest appropriately. It is expected that by the end of 2010, over 500,000 learners will have achieved a first full Level 2 qualification through Train to Gain.

Learning and Skills Council:

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.

Leitch Review of Skills

Published in December 2006, the Leitch Review warned that the UK must become a world leader in skills by 2020 if it is to sustain and improve its position in the global economy.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

All media enquiries contact:

LSC

Debbie Cooke on 0161 261 0434, deborah.cooke@lsc.gov.uk

The Write Angle

01772 250505

Louise Lancaster: louise@writeanglepr.co.uk

Angela Smith: angela@writeanglepr.co.uk