

TRAINING GOES CENTRE STAGE AS 1,000 SOUTH WEST EMPLOYERS MAKE THE SKILLS PLEDGE

Leading Bristol-based company takes regional total into four figures

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One of Europe's biggest providers of theatrical lighting, sound and staging equipment has become the 1,000th employer to make the Skills Pledge in the South West.

Stage Electrics, headquartered in Bristol, has joined organisations of all kinds and sizes in making a public commitment to invest in the region's workforce training.

The decision takes the number of people in the South West who are covered by an employer's Skills Pledge to around 415,000.

The Skills Pledge, led by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), is a voluntary commitment by organisations to actively support all employees to develop their skill levels to at least Level 2, the equivalent of 5 GCSEs (grade A-C).

Stage Electrics, which employs 240 people at a network of offices and support hubs across the UK, was congratulated by Paul Lucken, Director of Regional Skills of the LSC South West.

Paul said: "Crossing the 1,000 mark in the South West is a significant achievement as the region invests in the training and development that will help us all during the economic recovery.

"Stage Electrics deserves praise as the latest employer to see the Skills Pledge as a key step in raising skills to improve organisational performance."

After completing a skills audit and individual and team appraisals, Stage Electrics has enrolled a number of employees on an adult literacy course and is providing more intensive management training for its team leaders.

The skills development will support the company's work in providing technical services for professional and amateur theatre shows, business conferences and other live events in the UK and across the world.

Stage Electrics Managing Director David Whitehead said: "The Skills Pledge is central to our ongoing commitment to train and develop our employees and ensure they have the right skills and qualifications to support their future employment and meet the needs of our customers."

Businesses can access public funding and other support to deliver on their Skills Pledge through Business Link Advisers.

Making the Skills Pledge can be done online, with or without an adviser, at <http://inourhands.lsc.gov.uk>. The process involves registering and agreeing a statement of commitment, providing company details and creating an action plan based on training and development needs.

South West companies who have already focused on training after making the Skills Pledge report benefits in greater productivity and staff motivation.

The Dorset construction group Hearn made the Skills Pledge in line with its successful bid for Investor in People status.

Business Development Manager Malcolm Pitcher said: "We are much more focused on planning for the medium and long term and our staff have structured career paths and skills they didn't have before.

"In return they are given more responsibility. As well as the training plans, we have brought in better work scheduling, a better system for providing customer quotes and a clearer commercial model for managing payroll costs, margins and overheads."

The Somerset printing company Butler Tanner and Dennis has actively encouraged its employees to consider a more flexible career path after making the Skills Pledge.

Clinton Walker from Frome was on the print floor for 15 years before training as a sales representative. The 34 year old now works from both Frome and London, with clients recognising that he can talk with real experience about the whole print process.

Clinton said: "The new training approach has given me a great opportunity within the print industry that I wouldn't otherwise have had."

Among public sector employers in the South West, 26 of the region's 41 local authorities - 63 per cent of the total - have made the Skills Pledge. This compares to the national average for local government of 57 per cent. In addition, all the NHS trusts in the South West have made the commitment.

Ends

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Note to Editors:

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. For more information visit: www.lsc.gov.uk/southwest

The LSC South West has developed a series of case studies for the media explaining how employers in the region have implemented training after making the Skills Pledge. For more information, contact Scott Sinclair at Deep South Media on 01202 534487 or scott.sinclair@deepsouthmedia.co.uk.

The Skills Pledge is a voluntary, public commitment made by an organisation to invest in the skills of its workforce. The Skills Pledge is open to organisations of all sizes, from all sectors, with a workforce in England in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

It is a promise that the employer will work to realise the potential of all their employees by developing their skills and working towards relevant, valuable qualifications. By making the Skills Pledge employers commit to train their workforce to at least Level 2 – the equivalent of five good GCSEs, grades A–C.

Many organisations choose to use the Skills Pledge as a starting point, going on to help employees gain higher level qualifications. To ensure employees' skills meet their industry standard, the LSC encourages businesses to make this commitment a long term investment by raising their targets beyond the Level 2 benchmark.

Employers who make the Skills Pledge can also access the support of a Business Link adviser at no cost to their business. Advisers not only establish a company's skills needs and design a tailored training package but they may also be able to source funding to help cover some of the cost of training.

For more information on the Skills Pledge, phone 0845 600 9 006 or visit <http://inourhands.lsc.gov.uk>.

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