

## **100% training success helps the West Midlands' stake its claim for 'creative' capital**

**Date of issue** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007

**Publication number** 8

The next generation of rock bands, film producers and artists are doing their bit to help transform the region into a centre of creative industries enterprise it was revealed today.

Chiefs from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) predict that employment in the West Midlands' blossoming creative industry is set to grow by seven per cent in the next 12 months, fuelled by a major drive in skills that has trained over 1,000 people.

The organisation believes that the region has benefitted from an investment of £1.8million of European Social Fund cash, which has supported a range of innovative projects aimed at plugging major gaps in technical, leadership and management skills.

"We are now seeing the impact the Creative Industries are having on our economy with at least 60,000 people now employed in the sector," explained Michael Ryan at Birmingham LSC.

"This is a 15% increase in just two years, with more and more graduates turning their attention from traditional professions to careers in media, graphic design, educational software and cultural heritage."

He continued: "We are making progress in diversifying our economy. The challenge now is to make sure we build on recent successes and growth."

Employers in the region first came together in 2004 to secure a strong and vibrant network of skills for two growing areas – interactive media, such as film, TV, radio and digital, and creative and cultural media, including music, design, advertising and the arts. The Interactive Media Cluster Opportunity Group wanted a more innovative approach to the development of skills.

Its work led to the launch of eight specialist training projects including University of Central England's TIC i4 and Online Music Development, Creative Alliance, Kidderminster College and MAS Records, the Screen WM Training Fund and Creative Launchpad.

"Three years on and we've had virtually a 100% completion rate," added Michael.

"The projects have tackled a wide range of issues, from photo imaging and script writing to business start-ups and rock band development.

"New qualifications have been created, new companies set up and, importantly for the future of the sector, new networks established that will trade together, share skills and promote the region as a creative capital."

He added: "We have so far assisted 264 companies, trained 451 employees and secured 378 qualifications at various levels. We're setting the foundations for healthy sector growth, which will not only impact economically, but promote the region's profile both on the domestic front and internationally."

### **Meeting the need**

Research undertaken by the West Midlands Learning and Skills Council in 2003 revealed a number of interesting trends in the creative industries, not least the simple desire for better and more skills.

When questioned, 39% of managers in the interactive media field said that technical training was very important, whereas a further 31% and 28% agreed that continual professional development and leadership training respectively would be beneficial.

Over one third also identified gaps in financial skills and legal affairs, with 19% quoting general management as a concern.

"Computer modelling and animation, video editing and DVD authoring were all popular requirements and these were more than met through the raft of projects we funded, but research showed that business skills were also needed. We've

gone some way to addressing these, but much more needs to be done” continued Michael.

“With so many freelancers involved in this sector, we needed to ensure there were plenty of opportunities for self-directed learning, in order to help practitioners keep up to date with the latest technology and breakthroughs.

“The key to our success to date has been to get employers and learning providers working together. Now there is an increasingly strong talent and company base for continued commercial growth across the West Midlands,” he went on to add.

The Learning and Skills Council is now setting its sights on promoting the West Midlands as the ‘UK’s most creative region’ in a bid to secure one of the planned National Skills Academies and Creative and Media Academy.

## **Ends**

## **Notes to Editors**

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational 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 by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

All media enquiries please contact:

Russ Cockburn T: 01782 667050

E: [russ@hcl.uk.com](mailto:russ@hcl.uk.com)