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Apprenticeship News

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Some of the winners of the 2004 Apprenticeship Awards. See inside for more details.

6,000 and rising

Campaign response right on target

More than 6,000 companies are being contacted by brokers and training providers from throughout the country after responding to the first eight weeks of the Learning and Skills Council's national Apprenticeship marketing campaign.

Interest shown by businesses wanting to take on apprentices or learn more about the new family of Apprenticeships available to young people from the age of 14 and adults over 25 has far outstripped all expectations in the seven weeks since direct mailing began and television adverts appeared on our screens.

Around 48 per cent of employers who responded contacted the dedicated contact number **08000 150 400** to find out more while

25 per cent got in touch electronically through the website (www.apprenticeships.org.uk). The remainder were interactive satellite TV respondents who have been sent coupons to return.

All employers expressing an interest in Apprenticeships are being sent information packs within 24 hours and LSC regional co-ordinators are ensuring that they are contacted by brokers and training providers within seven days so that visits can be arranged to discuss their requirements.

The first phase of the campaign is primarily aimed at employers and has involved four weeks of national terrestrial and satellite TV advertising backed by direct marketing to more than 75,000

companies as well as newspaper advertising and PR activity.

But it has also had a marked impact on people interested in Apprenticeships as a way of embarking on careers. So far, around 28,000 individual leads have been generated as a result.

The second phase will begin in September after initial responses have been analysed and evaluated and suggestions considered. It is possible that further TV adverts will appear then and direct mailing will be resumed.

"The response we have had to date has been significantly higher than we anticipated and we are extremely pleased with that," said Glenn Robinson, LSC National Marketing

Manager leading on the regional follow-up to the campaign.

"The television advertising and direct marketing stopped a couple of weeks ago and we are now evaluating which media had the greatest impact so that we can plan for phase two of the campaign.

"Indications so far are that the re-branding of Apprenticeships has clearly appealed and the messages we have put out are hitting the mark. Early evidence is that leads are being converted at a higher level than in the past."

The LSC is seeking to generate more than 33,000 employer responses leading to the creation of up to 23,000 Apprenticeship places during 2004-05.

Campaign's first starts

The Learning and Skills Council's national Apprenticeship marketing campaign has recorded its first new starts with two young people from the South East of England already taking up posts and five more due to start shortly as a result of television advertising and direct mailing.

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Of almost 6,000 national expressions of interest from employers as a result of marketing activity, around 900 have come from the South East, making it the busiest of the nine regions responsible for converting leads into actual Apprenticeship places.

"The new starts are extremely encouraging and have come in response to the campaign from employers who knew what they wanted and had high awareness of what Apprenticeships were all about," said Heather Gray, the LSC's South East Regional Co-ordinator for Apprenticeships.

"We do not expect though that all employers will move that quickly and we believe

that it will normally take some time between companies expressing an interest in Apprenticeships and actually taking apprentices on."

Heather, who is based at LSC Kent and Medway, is delighted that the national campaign has generated such significant interest in her region, which covers local Learning and Skills Councils in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire; Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; Surrey; Sussex; Kent and Berkshire.

But she cautions against any expectations that the initial interest shown will bring in overnight results. "We would have been extremely surprised if this had led to the

creation of hundreds of Apprenticeship places in the first few months because that is simply not realistic," she said.

"Many of the employers we have contacted who have shown interest still have many questions about Apprenticeships and how they work, while others have vacancies for young people. In those cases we work with Connexions or the local provider network to find young people to match the jobs.

"The fact that so many leads are coming through is extremely heartening and the network is working well. We are out there talking to employers in response to their enquiries and we are confident this will lead to tangible results."

Heather Gray

The seven new apprentices, all from the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire area, have signed up to their Apprenticeship of choice less than eight weeks after the campaign began following the launch of new style Apprenticeships by the Education Secretary and Chancellor.

Spreading the word

Interest in the new family of Apprenticeships has grown considerably in the few weeks since their launch, with employers and leading national organisations throwing their weight behind the campaign to create more places for young people and adults.

The LSC has been in contact with hundreds of businesses and organisations through its ever growing database of interested partners.

"The number of organisations and businesses we are dealing with is growing all the time. More and more people are learning about Apprenticeships and getting in touch with us asking to be kept informed," said Roger Trollope, Project Director.

"People clearly understand the importance of work based learning and know that it is something they cannot ignore. These range from organisations and large companies who are actively promoting Apprenticeships to their members and within their businesses to those who want to be kept regularly updated on what the programme is delivering. "The response we are getting in the main from all the major

stakeholders is 'We want to help. How can we help?' It is absolutely terrific."

Among organisations and companies with which the LSC is in regular electronic and phone contact are government departments, Sector Skills Councils, the Association of Learning Providers, the Association of Colleges, the Small Business Service, Connexions, Business Link and BT.



Employers interested in Apprenticeships should call 08000 150 400

To find out more about Apprenticeships, visit www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Best of the best

Retail and construction companies came out on top in the Learning and Skills Council's first national Apprenticeship Awards held last month at London's Hilton Park Lane Hotel.

More than 1,000 employers and apprentices entered for the awards and were judged on a number of criteria including implementation of the Apprenticeship programme, evidence of the way Apprenticeships had benefited their businesses and the level of support provided to the young apprentices within their organisations.

The judging panel included business leaders such as George Cox, Director General of the Institute of Directors and Isabella Moore, President of the British Chambers of Commerce. The ceremony was hosted by Carol Vorderman and

attended by business and education leaders from across the country.

Bells Stores, the North East based convenience store chain, won Large Employer of the Year, while fast-growing micro-business florists, The Topiary Tree, took away a Special Award in the Small Employer category. Construction companies GA Roberts and Clarkson Evans were Small and Medium Employer winners respectively.

The national awards are the first held by the Learning and Skills Council, and recognise employers who are successfully using Apprenticeships to benefit their businesses and who have shown outstanding

commitment and support toward their young apprentices.

Mark Haysom, LSC Chief Executive, said: "Apprenticeships are a cornerstone in the work on skills development in England. Currently one fifth of job vacancies – some 135,000 places – remain unfilled because of a lack of skilled applicants.

"The Apprenticeship Awards are a great opportunity to recognise the crucial contribution UK businesses are making to raise skill levels and improve productivity and competitiveness nationally.

"I would like to congratulate all the winners and finalists

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Mark Haysom LSC Chief Executive

of the awards and express my delight at the exceptional commitment to Apprenticeships by both employers and young people. I look forward to increased take up of Apprenticeships by employers nationwide as these employers – the best of the best – act as our role models for the future."

The Learning and Skills Council confirmed at the ceremony that the national Apprenticeship Awards would be held again in 2005.

Apprenticeships in the news

Media interest in the new family of Apprenticeships for young people and adults has shown no sign of flagging in the weeks following their launch by the Education Secretary and Chancellor.

The Independent dedicated a page to Apprenticeships quoting Judith Norrington, Director of Curriculum and Quality at the Association of Colleges, as welcoming the move to open Apprenticeships to 14-16 year olds.

"Seventy thousand 14-16 year olds are already experiencing college in one way or another and this is hugely motivating for them," she said. "They talk about being treated like adults for the first time and this has a knock-on effect back at school."

Lucie Carrington, writing in the Daily Mail career page, highlighted the story of 29 year old Kevin Dunn, who has just completed a two-year Apprenticeship with the Tyneside shipbuilder Swan Hunter. "The LSC is piloting mature Apprenticeships later this year," she said. "As with the LSC's Apprenticeship programme for 16-24 year olds, mature

entrants will be given paid jobs while they work towards national vocational qualifications."

The Financial Times quoted John Butler, a director at Telford construction company McPhillips-Wellington, who explained the benefits of Apprenticeships as part of a two page feature on skills. "When apprentices start off at a young age you train them in the company's procedures and systems and they grow up with the company. If they work for somebody else for 10 years they come with bad habits." The company takes on six apprentices each year and estimates that around 15 per cent of its 250 strong workforce are either past or current apprentices.

The Daily Telegraph's Roland Gribben featured the LSC's Apprenticeship Awards 2004. "Almost a thousand apprentices and companies rushed to enter the first ever awards competition organised by the Learning and Skills Council to identify the best and most progressive young people and employers involved in raising the quality of the English workforce."

Raising professional standards

Large Employer Award

Winner: Bells Stores Ltd,
Tees Valley

Runners up: British Gas plc,
West Yorkshire
BMW (GB) Ltd,
Berkshire

Steven Bell, Chief Executive of Bells Stores, believes that it is not the cost of training staff that counts but the cost to the business of not training them.

“We believe passionately that Apprenticeship training raises our professional standards, supports our expansion plans and improves profitability,” says the head of the North East’s leading convenience store chain, founded by his father in 1968.

Now part of the Sainsbury’s Group, the company has 54 stores and more than 1,000 employees, turning over more than £70 million a year. It has plans to expand to 80 stores by 2005, so investment in staff training has never been more crucial.

Bells Stores has been involved in vocational training for more than two

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Steven Bell outside one of his stores

decades. In 1983, following a feasibility study showing the need for a quality regional training provider specialising in retailing, Steven’s father took advantage of a government grant to set up a stand alone training company, Bells Training Services.

Having adopted the ethos ‘matching people to expansion’, the company delivers Apprenticeships and many other work based learning programmes. Bells Stores also offers staff 150 in-house courses a year in

topics such as security, customer service, sale of restricted products, and management.

Training, says Steven, plays an integral part in keeping ahead of the competition. The advantage of having a dedicated training organisation is that courses are tailored to suit the company’s needs, with the added bonus of two satellite training centres and a Virtual Shop, designed to give learners confidence before they come face-to-face with real customers.

Staff development is also a high priority. The company was one of the first food retailers to be awarded Investors in People in 1992. Staff focus groups are held regularly as a way of ensuring effective internal communication and keeping a check on morale.

Bells offers job security and promotion opportunities to staff from within the business and many employees achieve management status at a young age. In return, the company expects staff to commit to training programmes designed to help them achieve job satisfaction, professionalism and first-rate customer care.

Building business with apprentices

Medium Employer Award

Winner: Clarkson Evans Limited,
Gloucestershire

Runners up: Weaver plc,
Hereford and
Worcestershire
Slack & Parr,
Leicestershire

The value of employing apprentices became crystal clear to Steve Evans shortly after he set up his electrical contracting company as a one man band 23 years ago. His first apprentice recruit is now his business partner.

Since taking on Steve Clarkson to help handle a new contract, the firm has continued to build its apprentice base to develop its workforce in the face of rapid growth. It now employs almost 200 people on electrical installation contracts for major house builders and turns over more than £7.5 million a year.

The company, which takes on around 30 new apprentices each year and has 60 employees working towards Apprenticeships in Electrical Installation, is so committed to developing the skills it needs that it has taken staff training in-house.

Clarkson Evans employs six full-time lecturers in a purpose built training centre at its headquarters in Gloucester. This has been so successful that it received the Government-backed Special National Training Award in 2001 and last year became one of the LSC’s Centres of Vocational Excellence.

“To meet customer demand, we needed to expand our workforce, but as there weren’t enough qualified electricians available, we decided to train people ourselves.” said Gerald Crittle, a director with the company.

As part of their schedule, staff spend one day a week at the training centre and the remaining time assigned to

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On the job training with Clarkson Evans

a small work team, with its own contracts and customers. Here, apprentices have the opportunity to learn ‘on the job’ and receive one-to-one training from their team leader.

“Having a highly trained, quality workforce undoubtedly has major business benefits, notwithstanding the ability to keep up with customer demand and increase turnover,” added Gerald. “There are high levels of satisfaction and confidence in both our workmanship and customer service.”

Laying foundations for success

Small Employer Award

Winner: GA Roberts and Son, Cheshire

Runners up: Upper Cut Hair Salons, West of England
Barlows Electrical Engineers, Sussex

George Roberts is in no doubt that apprentices have played an important role in helping develop the family building firm in Malpas, Cheshire, which he now runs with his wife Denise.

“The Apprenticeship system has really worked for us. It is very hard to separate the success of the business from the success of Apprenticeships,” he said.

GA Roberts and Son, founded by his father in 1980, has a workforce of 18 and turns over around £800,000 a year. There are currently seven apprentices within the company and five more have been trained within the last five years.

“In the building industry there is a shortage of skilled people, which can make recruitment difficult. We wanted to expand the workforce to meet customer demand, so decided that the only way to obtain staff was to train them ourselves.

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George Roberts

“We have now reached the stage where we employ a steady flow of apprentices, taking qualifications in both bricklaying and joinery. Because we have this extra capacity, we can take on bigger jobs over a shorter timescale which, in the long-term, enables expansion and increased turnover.”

Apprentices are taken on by the firm and attend a local college one day a week. Along with subject specific topics, they are taught IT, and managerial skills which, according to George, are essential if staff are to progress within the company.

For the remainder of the week, they work alongside the company's regular staff, gaining valuable experience. Most progress to advanced level qualifications and the majority stay with the company on completion. There are currently five employees who have gone through the Apprenticeship training programme – including the foreman – and all are now in supervisory roles.

George readily admits that they make the company what it is today. “In this business, word of mouth is everything and our reputation is only as good as the staff we employ. It is essential that they do a good job in terms of workmanship but they must also have good communication and social skills. After all, they are working in peoples' homes.”

Topiary Tree poised to blossom

Special Award

Winner: The Topiary Tree

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Having completed an Apprenticeship herself, she is delighted with the appointment of seventeen year old Gemma Piercy, who first joined The Topiary Tree on a day release project organised by her school and now works full time as an apprentice in floristry.

“There are huge advantages in undergoing a more formal training,” she said. “I was bought up with my mum as a florist and when I first went to college I thought I knew everything, but I soon realised I had plenty to learn.

“My mum is very talented and I will always give her the credit for my success but at college you get extra input from students and tutors, all of which helps you develop your own individual style.

“I can see this in Gemma Piercy already. She is bringing her own wacky ideas into her arrangements, which is great. I want our shops to earn a reputation for being modern and innovative so I need employees with ideas.”

Gemma remembers how much she got out of her own Apprenticeship and says that day release training is vital because, in a small business her own training resources are limited.

When she first joined her mother at The Topiary Tree in 1995 they decided to diversify from dried arrangements and began to trade in fresh flowers. Their growing success meant that new premises were needed to develop and they now run shops in Malton and Helmsley, turning over more than £200,000 a year.

Gemma has her heart set on a third shop before too long, hopefully in York. Further appointments will undoubtedly be apprentices. “I don't understand why more employers don't take them on,” she says. “Employers benefit because the training gives young employees independence, confidence and knowledge. Employees also win. Look at my case. I've seen friends of mine finish university with £15,000 debts. Meanwhile, I have no debts and I have my own house and car. I am also qualified in my chosen career and am running my own business.”

Gemma Piercy with Gemma Magson

Gemma Magson, 25, had no hesitation in making an apprentice as her first recruit to help cope with demand at the two busy florists shops she jointly owns with her mother in North Yorkshire.

Gemma leads the way

Young Learner Award Advanced Modern Apprentice

Winner: Gemma Evans, Coventry and Warwickshire

Runners up: Susan Coley, Birmingham and Solihull
Hannah Worsley, Shropshire

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Gemma Evans with Carol Vorderman at the Awards

Gemma Evans sees no reason why more young women should not follow her into an Apprenticeship in engineering, which has allowed her to go on into part time higher education to further her career.

The 21 year old, who works for the engineering company OLEO International, has actively sought to inspire and encourage others to enter engineering and reap the rewards she has already enjoyed. She feels it is important to dispel any myths or preconceptions young women may have about the industry and highlight the many opportunities available to them.

She has volunteered her time to represent the Learning and Skills Council at promotional events on

many occasions and has also taken part in several career days held at local schools.

Since starting work at OLEO, Gemma has made a significant contribution and implemented pioneering new systems, many of which have resulted in cost savings for the company. In August last year, her work was recognised with a promotion to the position of development engineer.

During her Apprenticeship she has managed to complete all levels of her NVQ and has now gone on to begin a part time BENG (Hons) degree in Mechanical Engineering – an achievement of which she is especially proud.

Her success is made all the more significant by the fact that she has had to overcome low self-

confidence caused by dyslexia. At school this often caused her to struggle.

“At school I had difficulties with my learning due to my dyslexia,” she said. “My Apprenticeship has helped me overcome these obstacles and I have now achieved my dream of going to university to study engineering.”

Gemma’s learning provider, Midland Group Training Services, is proud of her success. A spokesman said: “She has shown great determination throughout the period of her Apprenticeship and achieved all of her milestones, while making a significant contribution to new product development and cost savings within the company.”

A taste for management

Young Learner Award Foundation Modern Apprentice

Winner: Daniel Wilkinson, London Central

Runners up: Hollie Peters, London South
Nicholas Nutt, Coventry and Warwickshire

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Daniel Wilkinson

Daniel Wilkinson is aiming for a managerial position after getting a taste for responsibility at Nicholls and Clarke, a large builders and plumbers merchants where he works in central London.

The 19 year old warehouse trainee recently played an important role in helping the company develop by coordinating its relocation from Shoreditch to Chadwell Heath, 12 miles away.

Daniel volunteered to take responsibility for stock control during the move and oversaw the counting, sorting and packing of all the building and plumbing products carried in the warehouse.

He learned how to use company computer systems and introduced new ones for the relocation, keeping colleagues informed of what was going on and putting in extra hours so that the

move would not effect the company’s normal trading.

Things could have been very different for Daniel, who became depressed and irritable when he was forced to take a year off with a leg injury after completing his GCSEs. He was motivated by his father, who works at Nicholls and Clarke, and decided to embark

on an Apprenticeship in warehousing and distribution with the company.

Daniel speaks proudly of all that he has achieved and now aims to become a warehouse manager. He says that Apprenticeship training has increased his confidence and enabled him to gain a firm grounding in an industry in which he hopes to have a successful career.

Doug Dodds, Managing Director of Nicholls and Clarke Building Products Ltd, said “Daniel has achieved a vast amount since he joined us. Alongside his dedication to his studies and the extra hours he has put in both at work and college, he has exceeded all expectations.”

Courageous Daniel wins promotion

Personal Achievement Award 16-18

Winner: Daniel Russell, Greater Manchester

Runners up: Oliver Large, Black Country
Daniel Everett, Norfolk

Daniel Russell has shown tremendous courage and determination to complete his Apprenticeship and win promotion at the vending services company where he works in Manchester.

The 18 year old suffers from the rare condition, Cystic Hygroma and Heomangeoma, a facial disfigurement which

causes his face to change shape daily. He has undergone more than 200 operations and must re-visit hospital for treatment at least once every six months. He has a tube permanently inserted into his throat to help him breathe.

Daniel admits that he did not do as well at school as

he could because he was quiet and self-conscious but says that his Apprenticeship has made him a different person, full of confidence and eager to socialise.

On completing his training he was recently promoted by Manchester Vending Services to the job of warehouse supervisor, a position that has given him extra responsibility and challenge.

He speaks very highly of his Apprenticeship: "I would tell anyone thinking of doing an NVQ qualification just to get on and do it. It gives you job satisfaction and you also get to work and learn.

What is better than that?"

Sally Perry, Environmental and Quality Officer at the company, said: "It is incredible the extent to which the NVQ training has brought Daniel out of himself.

"When he first joined us his self-esteem was very low and he was a shy, withdrawn character who rarely came out of the warehouse. Today, he is full of fun and adventure.

We are all very proud of him and applaud his efforts at work, as well as his determination to raise money for the hospital unit that looks after him. He is a genuine star."

Karen breaks the mould

Personal Achievement Award 19-24

Winner: Karen Vaughan, Berkshire

Runners up: Jayson Kiggins, Cumbria
Lian Shaw, Leicestershire

It was a present she received as a young girl, a clockwork petrol pump and garage, that first sparked Karen Vaughan's interest in things mechanical. Now 23, she has established herself in the male dominated world of engineering.

Having completed her Apprenticeship, she is now the only female out of 180 engineering employees in West London working for Engenica, a division of Thames Water.

She has not let this deter her and recently won first prize for personal achievement in the Learners First Awards. "It was a real thrill for me to win first prize. I never expected to win in a

million years. I was astounded," she said.

Karen had to overcome many significant personal and family problems to complete her Apprenticeship in maintenance engineering, but her grit and determination to pull through have paid dividends.

She is the only apprentice with Engenica to be carrying out newly-developed condition based monitoring, which uses a combination of vibration analysis equipment, a thermal image camera and oil testing to determine the state of repair of sewage pumps, motors, gearboxes and other machinery.

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Carol Vorderman with Karen Vaughan and Daniel Russell winners of the Personal Achievement Awards

The system is revolutionary and she is now contributing further to Engenica's commercial success by contracting out her services to other industries. She is also the only employee, other than her manager, who is certified to use the equipment.

Karen believes there are real opportunities for women in the engineering sector. "We are still in the small minority but we are just as capable as any male," she said. "My job

involves precision, hard work and skill. I am proud of what I can do and see no reason why any other young woman couldn't do the same."

A spokesperson for Engenica said: "Karen's Apprenticeship has been dogged with personal difficulties yet she has gone on to master a new and cost effective way of approaching engineering that makes her an invaluable member of the team."

Apprenticeship leads to university for Richard

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Richard Whitaker – from Apprenticeship to university

A former welder with a Tyneside shipbuilder has embarked on a university Masters Degree course following a successful Apprenticeship which launched his career in the offshore engineering industry.

Richard Whitaker from Kenton left school at 16 with a single GCSE in Design and Technology to his name. Just six years later he is now working his way through a four

year degree qualification in Offshore Engineering at Newcastle University.

His move into higher education was the result of being offered an Apprenticeship at the Swan Hunter shipyard through learning provider Tyne North Training. This allowed him to learn his trade while attending South Tyneside College on day release to complete a City & Guilds Level 3 welding qualification.

He went on to further training and study and achieved a BTEC Higher National Certificate in Fabrication and Welding, the baseline standards which have allowed him to go to university.

“I really missed the boat at school and didn’t feel I got the chance to make the most of my opportunities,” said Richard. “It’s taken a lot of hard work since but the Apprenticeship put me on track and gave me a focus.

“My four years learning on the job at Swan Hunter was great and it was a natural progression to go on to further qualifications once I had the Apprenticeship under my belt. I’m delighted that I’ve got myself to university as a result.”

Richard, now 22, is one of an elite group from Tyne North Training to win a bursary from the

learning provider to help with university studies and fees.

“Richard was keen to progress and has proved to be highly motivated in his approach to the vocational training route,” said Alan Gregg, a training manager with Tyne North Training.

“I know Swan Hunter has always encouraged Richard to enhance his knowledge and skills and of course wished him well in settling into university life and hopefully a high level career in the offshore industry.

“We cater for the training of 250 apprentices, with sponsorship to a handful of outstanding candidates such as Richard who progress on to degree programmes. He thoroughly deserves his bursary for his determination and all the hard work he has put in.”

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