

THE EARWIG

UPDATES FROM WEST BERKSHIRE TRAINING CONSORTIUM

Dear Apprentices and Employers

Welcome to the latest edition of *The Earwig*. In January I outlined that we were working on the government's Reform of Apprenticeships with respect to charges for co-funded employers (those with payrolls below £3m per annum). I'm pleased to say that this has been completed and my colleagues Rachel and Jenny will be in touch to outline our arrangements with you. Now, we're still waiting for our partners to confirm their 'prices' with us for example accounting, engineering and construction. However, we feel reasonably confident to update employers who will be co-funded, of our 2017 prices.

February was also LGBT History Month and a chance for all to reflect on the evolution of social attitudes towards sexuality and transgender issues. WBTC actively promotes the widening of opportunity for learners who are LGBT and we seek to constantly challenge and break down the obstacles that they may face. We remind all of our employers that when we contract together you agree to uphold our equality and diversity policy which can be found on our website here:

www.wbtc-uk.com/policies-procedures

We're also hosting two seminars for employers who are Apprentice Levy Funded to offer further information, advice and guidance. This edition we also provide guidance for making nominations in our Rising Stars Awards 2017

SUCCESS FOR BENCHMARK..! LOCAL EMPLOYER RECOGNISED AS A TOP 100 APPRENTICESHIP EMPLOYER

Benchmark Furniture has been a WBTC customer for 30 years. Their rich tradition of taking on and progressing apprentices has seen many of their former trainees become managers and directors. It is therefore a great pleasure to hear that they have been recognised in the prestigious Centrica Top 100 Apprenticeship Employer list, which is compiled annually by the National Apprenticeship Service and recognises excellence in businesses that employ apprentices.

The list was announced at the National Apprenticeship Awards, which took place on 20 January at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London. After a tough selection process the most exceptional apprenticeship employers from all around the UK went forward to feature in the list, which showcases the breadth of employers who now offer apprenticeships. Commenting on the company's entry in the Top 100 Apprenticeship Employer list, Benchmark's MD, Sean Sutcliffe said

"It's brilliant to have been recognised as a Top 100 Employer. We have been running our apprenticeship scheme for 30 years and former apprentices make up more than half our workforce and fill some of the most senior positions in the company. When I look at the new apprentices in our workshop today I'm looking at the future of our business. Our apprenticeship programme really is the cornerstone of our business and it always will be."

Sue Husband, Director of the National Apprenticeship Service commented on Benchmark being named a Top 100 Apprenticeship Employer: "These Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers are making a difference to the lives of their apprentices by investing in their future. In return, apprentices are helping employers to develop a skilled, qualified workforce to build a stronger economy."

To view the full Centrica Top 100 Apprenticeship Employer List, please visit GOV.UK

Benchmark will be holding an Apprenticeship Open Day on 1st April 2017 for young people interested in starting as an apprentice in September 2017. For further information visit www.benchmarkfurniture.com/apprenticeships

Matt Garvey
Managing Director



LATEST APPRENTICESHIP STATISTICS SUGGEST A GROWING CONFIDENCE



The Department of Education has confirmed that there were 509,400 Apprenticeship starts in the 2015/16 academic year, an increase of 1.9 per cent on 2014/15. Other figures of note include a drop of 11.2% in maths and English participation, whilst starts for Traineeships and loan-funded provision rose by 26.1% and 24.1% respectively.

Further detail in the statistics published recently in the FE Data Library show that there were 155,630 Apprenticeships starts in the UK for the first quarter of the 2016/17 academic year (August to October 2016), a provisional figure.

The details suggests that the proportion of starts at each level of Apprenticeship is shifting somewhat. Once final figures are in, Intermediate starts are likely to account for around 4% fewer apprenticeship starts in Q1 2016/17 than they did in Q1 2014/15, whilst starts on Higher levels account for 3% more over the same period. (The proportion of starts at Advanced level is staying about the same over time.) The largest sector subject areas remained Health and Social Care with over 20,000 starts and Business Administration, Management and Construction Skills each with over 10,000 starts in the quarter. There were 4,800 starts on Standards are reported in the first quarter of the 2016/17 academic year (760 Intermediate, 2680 Advanced and 1360 Higher), which compares to 4,400 starts on Standards across all four quarters of the 2015/16 academic year.

Commenting on the figures, AELP CEO Mark Dawe said: "We welcome the rise, particularly in respect of applications. The message is starting to get through that for many young people, apprenticeships now offer greater progression opportunities than a traditional academic route."

ESF FUNDING FOR SMALL-MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN BERKSHIRE

The European Social Fund has supported many innovative projects in our area over the last 20 years. This latest and most likely final round of funding is just as exciting. It is aimed at companies in Berkshire with 249 or fewer employees. It is called Skills Support for the Workforce (SSW) and provides funding for training for staff aged 19+.

- It is fully funded training potentially saving a business thousands of pounds
- Aimed at smaller or bite sized sessions
- Ideal for existing staff wishing to improve or broaden their skills
- Includes a training needs analysis of your organisation
- There is a focus on progressing participants into Adult Apprenticeships

We delivered this programme last year with great success and we aim to offer opportunities in:

- Management (particularly the Level 3 ILM Award)
- Office Skills
- IT Skills
- Customer Service



This programme is delivered in partnership with East Berkshire College. Jenny Hyam and Rachel Eaves, along with project manager Jon Thompson will be providing the advice and guidance to local employers. If you are a Berkshire organisation with 249 or fewer staff who would like to benefit from this opportunity then contact: Jenny@wbtc-uk.com, Rachel@wbtc-uk.com or Jon@wbtc-uk.com

HEALTH & SAFETY INFORMATION

WBTC HEALTH & SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENTS

Any apprenticeship programme through WBTC, even for an experienced existing employee, requires a Health & Safety Risk Assessment. This is because, should an apprentice have an accident, WBTC may have vicarious responsibility along with the employer. In the past, training providers have been successfully prosecuted in the event of an apprentice accident, injury or fatality because they failed to adequately risk assess the employers that they were working with. WBTC does not want any apprentice or learner to be unsafe.

At WBTC we group employers into three bands

- Low risk - office environments
- Medium risk - areas open to the public (shops), health care settings, gardening
- High risk - warehouses, workshops, construction sites, working with hazardous substances

Low risk environments will be risked assessed i.e. visited by a WBTC representative who is qualified to IOSH level 3 or higher. Where the risk assessment is satisfactory we will re-assess every 3 years.

Medium and High risk environments will be assessed by a Nebosh level 4 consultant or higher. Medium risk establishments will be reassessed every 2 years and High risk establishments will have their risk assessment renewed annually.

What is in the risk assessment?

We cover mandatory good practice to ensure that employers are safe. This will include the legal minimum as well as recommended good practice. Any reputable employer will comply as a matter of course. However, should we find any non-compliance then we'll offer advice and guidance. An action plan will provide 1 month to fix anything you've missed. This could be something simple like replacing an expired fire extinguisher.



If compliance is not in place?

If an action plan is offered and not completed then we'll be unable to work together. This is because the employer will be contravening health & safety regulations or breaking the law. Think of it this way, would you want your child working as an apprentice in a place you knew wasn't safe?

This is a free service

We know that Health & Safety isn't the most scintillating topic on earth. Then again, appearing in court or paying a fine isn't so great either. We're offering free assurance from qualified professionals to give you peace of mind that you're a safe environment. If we do offer an action plan then look upon this as free consultancy too.

A cautionary tale

I won't spoil your appetite with a gruesome story, just a true experience. I called a new employer to tell them about a health & safety risk assessment visit. The employer didn't sound impressed. 'I don't want someone poking their nose around my workshop,' they said. 'The last time I had someone do a health & safety visit they found loads of things wrong'; Funny but true!



CHANGES TO MINIMUM WAGE RATES FROM APRIL 1ST 2017

It's sometimes hard to keep track of the various national wage rates. Usually these increase in October. However, this year the changes are in April, possibly to align them with the financial year.

| Year | 25 and over | 21 to 24 | 18 to 20 | Under 18 | Apprentice |
|-----------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| October 2016 (current rate) | £7.20 | £6.95 | £5.55 | £4.00 | £3.40 |
| April 2017 | £7.50 | £7.05 | £5.60 | £4.05 | £3.50 |

The WBTC Apprentice Minimum Wage, a contractual agreement with WBTC and employers is £4.00 ph for any start since 1st August 2016. Please note that we'll amend this to £4.25 ph for any apprentice new start from **1st August 2017**. This reflects the higher cost of accommodation and travel in our area.

APPRENTICE GRADUATION & RISING STARS AWARDS



We've had a great response from apprentices due to graduate and it looks like being a packed house at Arlington Arts Centre on 19th April 2017. We'll now be liaising with the attendees to sort out your graduate gowns, guests and answer any questions that you have. We have published a full list of apprentices in scope for any invite on our award pages here www.wbtc-uk.com/Awards2017

If you're on our list of graduates but haven't received an invite you can drop us a line by contacting mandy@wbtc-uk.com

Graduation attire

Once again, thanks to our sponsors, we'll be laying on complimentary graduation attire for the ceremony. This will be arranged by WBTC directly with the attending graduates. We'll just need your height and head size (S/M/L) and everything will be taken care of:

- Intermediate Apprentices: Black cap, gown and purple stole
- Advanced Apprentices: Black cap, gown and gold stole
- Higher Apprentices: Black cap, gold tassle, black gown and purple and gold stole
- Please note that level 4 & 5 ILM students will be graduating in Higher Apprentice attire.

Email: temp@wbtc-uk.com if you have any questions.

Graduation Photos

Also thanks to our sponsors we'll be providing a photographer. You'll be able to have a formal headshot prior to the ceremony as well as your graduating photo with the guest of honour. After the event these will be made available to you, free of charge, via our Facebook page. All of us at WBTC must stress the generosity of our sponsors which allows us to make the event, the graduation gowns and photos free of charge for all apprentices.



Rising Stars Awards - nominations close **Wednesday 1st March!**

You can nominate in eight categories spanning apprentices, learners, mentors and employers. You can nominate someone you work with, a friend or relative or even yourself. We'd love to hear from you. The eight categories are:

Employer Categories

Large Employer of the Year (250+ employees)
Sponsored by Newbury Weekly News

Medium Employer of the Year (50-249 employees)
Sponsored by BGM Heating & Plumbing Ltd

Small Employer of the Year (10-49 employees)
Sponsored by Environmental Solutions

Micro Employer of the Year (9 or fewer employees)
Sponsored by Bayer Plc

Individual Categories

Workplace Mentor of the Year
Sponsored by Benchmark Furniture

Great Start Learner of the Year
Sponsored by James Cowper Kreston

Apprentice of the Year (19+)
Sponsored by Verbatim Call Centres

Apprentice of the Year (16-18)
Sponsored by Sovereign

In each case we're looking for a story that describes how the nominee has done something extra. For an apprentice it could be surpassing the expectations of the employer, taking on extra responsibility or being great with customers. For mentors we're looking for that all round supporting confidante. Someone who passes on their skills, worldly advice and does it with a friendly attitude. The Great Start Learner award is for those on work experience to get ready for an apprenticeship, Nominees may have made that leap forward and secured themselves a job or made great strides in their English & maths. For the employer awards we're seeking those who live and breathe apprenticeships and learning. They'll have put in place people who are committed and enthusiastic about vocational training and the nominees will have done their utmost to make learning an integral part of their organisation.

Visit here to nominate www.wbtc-uk.com/Award_Categories



SAFEGUARDING & PREVENT DUTY

FUNDAMENTAL BRITISH VALUES: DISCRIMINATION & COMPANY 'DRESS CODES'

A recent campaign started by employee Nicola Thorp, who was sent home from work for not wearing high heeled shoes, has highlighted occurrences of some employers discriminating employees by the terms of their dress code.

The case, which is now being debated in Parliament following Nicola's successful petitioning, is an example of the Fundamental British value of Individual Liberty potentially altering the UK law on dress code in the workplace. Rule of Law, of course, being another British value. Under current law, employers can implement a dress code to ensure that employees are dressed in a manner that is appropriate for its particular business, provided this would not be deemed discriminatory. So in Nicola's example, a policy of requiring women to wear high heels would likely amount to sex discrimination.

Issues of legality are raised in cases of this kind when there are no corresponding rules for men, and where the requirement could put the employee at a disadvantage.

Employment law solicitor Laura Allner, has commented: "A policy of wearing high heels would almost certainly be considered 'indirectly discriminatory' provided a female complainant could show that the policy puts women - and her in particular - generally at a disadvantage. Given the health issues associated with high heels, this argument would have merit. A key issue is whether or not the employer can justify its policy." She goes on to give an example: "If there are health and safety reasons requiring employees' hair to be kept in a particular style, then this may be justifiable."

Nicola Thorp herself, has commented: "This incident made me realise that actually my employer didn't want me to just look smart and professional, they wanted me to look attractive."

If an employee feels they have been discriminated against through terms of dress code, they can raise a grievance an employer. If this is unsatisfactory the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service are the next point of referral.



There are penalties for companies who fall foul of the current law. For example, where an employee succeeds in a claim of unlawful discrimination, compensation is awarded largely on the basis of injury to feelings (requiring complainant's evidence). If the employee has also been dismissed or resigns and succeeds in a claim for unfair dismissal, then again compensation for a discriminatory dismissal is uncapped and includes an element for lost earnings too.

If you would like any further advice and guidance, please contact martyn@wbtc-uk.com

EMPLOYER SEMINARS TO HELP EXPLAIN THE REFORM OF APPRENTICESHIPS

The Apprentice Levy is almost upon us and to help you get to grips with what it is, how it works and how your company fits into things, we are hosting two lunchtime seminars. They are free of charge but space is limited so early booking is advised. Lunch will be provided.

Date: Thursday 30th March 2016
Location: WBTC offices
Time: 12.00 -14.00
Bookings: rachel@wbtc-uk.com

(This session is now full but we do have a reserve list for those who can only make this date)

Date: Thursday 6th April
Location: WBTC offices
Time: 12.00 -14.00
Bookings: rachel@wbtc-uk.com

Any employer with an annual payroll of £3m or more will pay the Apprenticeship Levy from 1st April 2017 and be able to 'spend' their Apprenticeship Levy Digital Account from 1st May 2017. This is a new tax and we have to assume that it is forever. This seminar brings together Levy payers for information, advice and guidance from WBTC's Managing Director Matt Garvey. It will also be a chance for attendees to network and share ideas.

The Apprenticeship Levy is potentially an exciting but intricate arrangement for larger employers to fund their apprenticeships. There are plenty of issues that spin off from this revolution in vocational learning that go beyond the mechanics of the tax itself. This seminar will explore:

- How the Apprenticeship Levy works in practice
- How the Digital Accounts for employers work and some useful tools to help you
- What benefits can be gain from the Apprenticeship Levy
- The move from apprenticeship frameworks to apprenticeship standards and how this helps employers

If you have a group of decision makers/influencers who want advice and guidance on The Apprenticeship Levy then we could always come to you. To arrange this, send an email to: matt@wbtc-uk.com

Apprenticeship Levy 2017



WORKSHOPS, COURSES AND ACTIVITIES

Most of the events below are free of charge to WBTC members. To book, please use the email address against each event. Spaces go fast so please let us know ASAP if you wish to make a reservation.

VIEW & BOOK COURSES ONLINE
Course details are all available on our website here

We had 8 no-shows at our January Time Management Workshop (some will appreciate the irony). Reasons were varied but included participants who forgot. This is a shame because we had people on a waiting list. Consequently we're introducing a £35 no-show fee for anyone who fails to attend without notice. This will be invoiced care of the employer. WBTC will also enhance the confirmation process as follows:



- We'll confirm your attendance by email and send a meeting request that you can import to your outlook or webmail calendar.
- We'll confirm your space with your employer and call you 2-3 days prior to the event.

MARCH

NEGOTIATING SKILLS

We all have to negotiate at sometime, whether commercially or with colleagues, it is a valuable and powerful skill.

- Preparing to negotiate
- Understanding how to achieve a win-win outcome
- The power of persuasion in negotiating

Venue: WBTC
Date: Friday 24th March, 09:30 - 12:30
Contact: bethp@wbtc-uk.com
Cost: Free for WBTC members. £100 for non members



APRIL

SELF MOTIVATION AND TEAMWORK

This workshop focuses on techniques to keep energy levels high at work and build great team relationships. In this session you will explore:

- What motivates you and how to stay focused
- Understanding the dynamics of teams and leaders
- Starting with the end in mind to achieve team success

Venue: WBTC
Date: Friday 7th April, 09:30 - 12:30
Contact: bethp@wbtc-uk.com
Cost: Free for WBTC members. £100 for non members



INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL MARKETING

This workshop with guest trainer, Adrian Bishop, looks at the revolution in business marketing that has arisen from online sources. This workshop is aimed at anyone who wants to boost their company profile online, promote their business and explore how social media sites can increase customers:

- Using Facebook, LinkedIn & Twitter in a business setting
- How Instagram, Pinterest and Whatsapp can boost your marketing message to achieve team success

Venue: WBTC
Date: Friday 21st April, 09:30 - 16:00
Contact: bethp@wbtc-uk.com
Cost: £49 for WBTC members. £149 for non members



MANAGEMENT MASTERCLASS 2 - Leading & Managing for Results

This is our 2nd session in the Management Masterclass suite for aspiring and current managers. This one day workshop is delivered by our ILM tutor Hannah Gibson. In this session we will explore:

- Leadership styles to increase productivity from teams
- Target setting and monitoring
- Techniques to improve the performance of individuals

Venue: WBTC
Date: Monday 24th April
09:30 - 16:30
Contact: jenny@wbtc-uk.com
Cost: £199 for WBTC members.
£259 for non members



PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

This morning workshop is about the written communication we produce and making it look professional. A poor letter or email can reflect badly on a company so this session will explore:

- How to construct a professional business letter
- Good practice in the use of emails and their content
- Giving a professional image of you and your company

Venue: WBTC
Date: Friday 28th April, 09:30 - 12:30
Contact: bethp@wbtc-uk.com
Cost: Free for WBTC members. £100 for non members



MAY

FACE-TO-FACE CUSTOMER SERVICE

All businesses are judged by the way they help (or otherwise) their customers. First impressions can last a lifetime so it is vital that our face-to-face customer service is professional, positive and personable. This session will explore:

- How to make a positive first impression
- Ways to present your organisation is a professional light
- Helping customers who are confused, angry or upset

Venue: WBTC
Date: Friday 12th May, 09:30 - 12:30
Contact: beth@wbtc-uk.com
Cost: Free for WBTC members. £100 for non members



WBTC

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