

Training for work — delivering skills for the future

The Coalition Government has promised to deliver the strong medicine that will safeguard the UK's future economic health; but with small businesses continuing to fold at an alarming rate and some economists raising the prospect of a double dip recession, will the training sector also become a casualty of the continuing downturn?

THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR THE ISLE OF WIGHT

James Kerr, Cathy Budden, Zara Macalister, and Debs Allan report on the Island's training sector.

he Isle of Wight offers a wide variety of training possibilities for its young people, and the standards maintained by the majority of the Island's vocational training providers are exceptionally high – according to the most recent Ofsted reports.

The Isle of Wight Chamber of Commerce's Young Chamber initiative has become a national flagship for developing the enthusiasm and drive of young entrepreneurs, but Island wages continue to lag badly behind the rest of the South East, and there is a deepseated view that career development can only occur across the Solent. So what positive messages are training providers and their employment partners able to offer young Islanders?

Business benefits

All of the people that *Island Business* spoke to agreed that investment in quality training and apprenticeships is well rewarded in the long term for businesses. "Research shows that three in four business people believe that their organisation would not succeed without investment in training," according to Gill Rogers, Business Development Manager of SMART Training.

Janet Westwood, Training and HR Manager at GKN, said the benefits of training are two-fold; a better skilled and more highly motivated workforce. "The acquisition of new skills improves efficiency of process and increases the capacity of employees to react to new processes and techniques," she explained. Janet went on to explain that a number of senior GKN employees have progressed within the company from the starting point of an apprenticeship.

Sarah Edwards, founder of Regional Training and Regeneration Trust (RT2), the organisation that plans to bring a permanent 'pannier' market place to Newport, believes businesses must look SEPTEMBER 2010



at long-term career development opportunities with young trainees: "It's important that businesses see training as more than just the statutory apprenticeship, and wherever possible, businesses should create a pathway for an apprentice to take within a firm. Training is a long-term investment that can create a really good and supportive set of employees," she pointed out.

Fidelma Washington, Director for Workforce Skills at Island Training (the Isle of Wight College), agreed, and said that the College tries to practice what it preaches: "We have increased the number of apprentices that we take on, all of whom have progressed onto full-time employment opportunities within the College."

Working together

There are plenty of examples of Island businesses working successfully with training providers to deliver the most challenging and fulfilling opportunities for trainees. GKN Aerospace has worked closely with Island Training to deliver a number of its schemes, and the College also has close training links with local schools.

"Island high schools are developing strong links with businesses that will open up training opportunities for young people in the future. In September 2009, in recognition of its collaboration with local businesses such as BAE, GKN, Liz Earle, and Strainstall and supported by the Chamber of Commerce through the Young Chamber, Cowes High School was awarded specialist status for Business

and Enterprise," said Phil Segal, the school's Business Coordinator.

"Partnership with other people is really important," said Jon Ely, Chief Executive of UKSA, the marine training charity that provides a variety of training programmes, including a BTEC offered in conjunction with Island high schools and the Isle of Wight College, and a three-year cadetship programme run with Plymouth University. "We don't believe we can provide everything for everybody, so working with other training providers is really important," he said.

Counting the benefits

A crucial element in ensuring that training providers successfully partner employers, in order to provide the best opportunities and outcomes for young Islanders, is full commitment from Island businesses, so it is vital that they are made aware of the benefits of providing training and the financial inducements that currently exist.

"We need to make employers aware of the opportunities that are available to them. We've got a lot of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on the Island and some of those employers will see taking on an apprentice as a big commitment," said Fidelma Washington. "I think that if they can see the benefits of taking those apprentices on, they will be more willing to engage," she said, and explained that under current legislation, if the learner in an apprenticeship programme is between 16 and 18 years of age, their training is fully funded.

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"There are very few programmes when you are age 16 where you can earn £95 per week, plus get all your training free; because £95 per week is less than the national insurance threshold, the young person takes 100% of that home."

Rachael Fidler, Managing Director of training provider HTP

Rachael Fidler, Managing Director of training provider HTP, pointed out: "If an employer wishes to take on a 16-18year-old apprentice, they can currently access £1,500 to support that learner via a European social fund grant that is managed by a company called Aspire on the mainland." And she believes that apprenticeships continue to offer a great deal for young people: "There are very few programmes when you are age 16 where you can earn £95 per week, plus get all your training free; because £95 per week is less than the national insurance threshold, the young person takes 100% of that home," she said.

Some employers feel that there should be more in the way of financial inducements when partnering a training provider in apprenticeship schemes. Rachael Fidler explained that HTP was involved in a pilot scheme offering a 'golden hello' to employers: "The grant was worth £2,500 and it did help to encourage employers, particularly SMEs," she said.

Red tape

Bureaucracy may be seen as a barrier by some firms; however, the individuals interviewed by *Island Business* concurred that close partnering with the Island's training providers reduced the amount of form filling, and that the benefits far outweighed the bureaucratic burden. Moreover, Fidelma Washington said that one of the Coalition Government's

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FEATURE

UniTrain



UniTrain, established in 2007, provides training courses for a number of international clients, including

Fujitsu, O2, Sarah Lee, and Akzo Nobel (formerly ICI) in various areas, particularly IT, personal development, project management, management sales, and HR.

Kieren Chapman, UniTrain's Director, moved to the Island in 2007 "in order to get away from the rat race", but having established a successful new business with mainland clients, is now hoping to break into the local training market. "Our plan is to open a training centre on the Island in the next couple of years, offering a range of public courses. The idea is to offer Island businesses our training courses but have close enough links so that we can attract mainland customers," said Kieren.

Kieren believes training should be directed at developing the individual talents of employees, with the benefit to the company springing from a sense of loyalty among staff.

While Kieren acknowledged that the training sector has experienced a slowdown in business, he pointed out that companies are looking more closely at the training they provide, in order to create precise, bespoke development programmes that are more closely targeted to their needs.

Kieren remains optimistic about the future of the training sector: "I don't think training is looked upon as a luxury anymore; training is a necessity in order to grow and develop staff. The past couple of years have been particularly hard for businesses and they need to look at their staff as the key to their future success," he said.

To hear more about UniTrain, watch the video on *Island Business Online* and visit www.unitrain.co.uk/index.php. THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE FOR THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Andrew Turner, MP

Isle of Wight

priorities is to reduce the amount of bureaucracy for institutions like the Isle of Wight College that are recognised as high-quality training providers.

Member of

Parliament

Andrew Turner

considered the

way in which

the Island's

business

landscape has changed in the past

10-15 years and argued that while

the number of large employers has

fallen, there are far more small

businesses and creating

such as training.

employers building up successful

opportunities, for example in areas

Andrew feels very strongly that one

of the key future challenges in the

for people who are not going to

help to retain young people with

believes that university attendance

targets have been set too high in the

shouldn't go to university, but I feel

that there needs to be much more

choice for youngsters," he said.

of highly skilled employment

The Conservative MP agreed that

there may be a cycle in which a lack

opportunities creates a drain on the

Island's skilled workforce. "The fact

is, at the moment, people are seeing

that more opportunities lie on the

opportunities here now than there

Andrew praised the work being done

by HTP and UKSA, and the Chamber

initiative, and commented: "What we

need is to do well in the areas where

areas which are on the mainland, but

the areas which work on the Island."

He concluded: "I think there's a real

flexibility about people on the Island

which I'm not so sure exists on

To hear more of Andrew Turner's

thoughts about training and the

Island Business Online.

Island economy, watch the video on

the mainland."

we're special, not necessarily those

of Commerce's Young Chamber

mainland, but there are far more

were 15 years ago," he said.

practical skills on the Island. He

past: "I'm not suggesting for a

moment that the very bright

sector is to develop the right training

university, suggesting that this might

Monitoring progression

Clearly, the success or failure of an individual's training depends not only on the learner's level of commitment, but also on the level of engagement provided by the employer. "In a really successful apprenticeship programme, an employer will appoint a supervisor who will be the key point of contact for the provider, the employee, and the apprentice," maintained Rachael Fidler. She said it is vital that trainees are regularly monitored and, as much as possible, involved with their training plan. This kind of hands-on approach can also help businesses to hold on to newly trained staff.

Once businesses have made a financial commitment to training, they will want to ensure that newly trained members of staff are retained and continue to add value to the business. Janet Westwood said it is incumbent upon businesses to create the right environment so that skilled employees are not lost to competitors: "In order to retain apprentices, businesses need to have fair terms and conditions and to create the possibility of job progression with the right initiatives in place," she said.

Island economics

A continued commitment to training is fundamentally important to the Island's future economic success. According to Sarah Edwards: "On the Isle of Wight, there is sometimes a challenge of providing appropriately skilled people to support businesses that move to the Island; training local people is important so that we are ready to support businesses that chose to locate here.

"We have a large tourist industry and I know that through the Eco Island agenda there are moves to support a more diverse tourist offering; there would be huge opportunities for employment and training through those," continued Sarah.

Andrew Turner MP is clearly enthusiastic about the potential benefits of sustainable business on the Island. Local company Blade Dynamics has recently received a cash injection of £400,000 for developing offshore

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turbine technology, much of which will be used in the training of Island people, according to Mr Turner.

"We are a small community with perhaps limited opportunities to develop a structured career, so as far as the Island's economy goes, training is incredibly important," said GKN's Training Manager Janet Westwood.

Rachael Fidler agreed, and said it was vital to ensure that young Islanders were given a fair share of the training opportunities provided by new business development. The new Cowes secondary school build will start in October 2010, subject to planning, and Rachael explained that the Cowes Pathfinder Trust will require subcontractors to take on Island apprentices during the construction process. She also expressed the hope that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme to overhaul the Island's road infrastructure would facilitate the training of many young Island people.

Mainland versus Island

One of the difficulties faced by businesses is a perceived lack of opportunities on the Island, which some observers would argue creates a 'brain drain' across the Solent. Andrew Turner acknowledged that talented young Islanders would always be tempted by greater opportunities on the mainland, but argued that conditions were better today than 15 years ago, as a greater number of SMEs offered a more diverse set of employment and training options.

The performance of Platform One Music College appears to bear this out. The college offers the first full-time degree on the Isle of Wight, and attracts 50% of its students from the mainland and Europe for its BA(Hons) in Commercial Music. David Pontin, Platform One Director, claims the college has trained graduates who have subsequently remained on the Island and continue to contribute to its financial and cultural economy.

Credit crunch

The effects of the recession have varied across the training sector, but all of the people that *Island Business* spoke to stressed the need for employers to maintain commitment to a skilled workforce. "We're in a big recession and training budgets are one of the first



GKN Aerospace

As one of the Island's largest employers, GKN Aerospace is involved in various apprenticeship and training

programmes.

Janet Westwood, Training and HR Manager, said: "For some time, we have been running craft and technician training programmes for apprentices; we run NVQ levels 2 and 3 in areas such as warehousing, composites, treatments, and business improvement techniques."

The company has worked closely with Island Training in delivering these schemes, and Janet explained how the partnership works: "We select the candidates and Island Training provide the funding up to a certain level. We work together on a collaborative basis to produce the results for apprentices and those on work-based training programmes," she said.

"Over the past four years, we've had 28 apprentices who have either completed or are going through training. We've had 25 Train to Gain candidates and approximately 15 people doing the business improvement techniques NVQ, as well training for NVQ assessors internally," said Janet.

Janet believes that the key to enhancing apprenticeship and training experiences for employees is for businesses to put in place the right level of support and to provide adequate training resources.

Businesses that are prepared to make that commitment will be well-rewarded over the long term. "There are people that have come out of the apprenticeships 20 years, 10 years, five years ago, who have now reached senior management level," she pointed out.

To find out more about training opportunities at GKN, watch the video on *Island Business Online* and visit www.gknaerospace.com.

FEATURE

HTP



HTP training has been established on the Island for more than 10 years and employs nearly 100 people who

operate across the whole of the Isle of Wight and the South East, providing apprenticeship training in the service sector, which comprises areas such as hospitality and catering, customer service retail, management development, and child care.

One of HTP's most successful initiatives is the young apprenticeship programme, in which HTP works in partnership with the Isle of Wight College and through the 14–19 Partnership. "The one we are particularly involved in, hospitality, we've had 100% retention and 100% progression on those programmes," said HTP Managing Director Rachael Fidler.

While future plans for apprenticeship programmes are subject to the Coalition Government's review, Rachael is keen to stress that HTP has a Young Apprenticeship programme in place for 2011 and wants to get the message across that at the moment, "if you need to do something and want to continue your training, then apprenticeship funding is guaranteed at age 16–18".

Rachael believes the Island is well placed to train the next generation Island workforce: "We've got an extremely successful training sector, we have a College that is beacon status, HTP training are beacon status and the other providers on the Island are all good on the Ofsted scale.

"There is an extremely successful training sector on the Island which our employers use, and there are very few other areas in the country that could boast that," she said.

To find out more about HTP, watch the video on *Island Business Online* or visit www.htptraining.com. IB-SEPTEMBER2010-12-19_Feature.qxd:Island Business 14/9/10 09:02 Page 16

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Island Training / Isle of Wight College



The Isle of Wight College is one of the Island's main training providers, and currently delivers training

diverse as engineering, construction, hospitality, and horticulture, as well as office-based administration including customer service, IT, management, and team leading.

Fidelma Washington, Director for Workforce Skills, outlined the College's various training initiatives: "Island Training is the employer engagement arm of the College. We offer a lot of work-based training for people who are already employed; we have assessors who go out into the workplace to assess their competencies and that builds into, for example, an NVQ," she said.

"We deliver apprenticeship programmes in a broad range of curriculum areas. We provide courses tailored for Island businesses and we are also involved in programmes for the unemployed," explained Fidelma.

With apprenticeships set to become the main training priority for the Coalition Government, Fidelma stressed that the College will expand its delivery in this area. "We deliver level 2 apprenticeships and level 3 advanced apprenticeships. But the Government wants an increased number of level 3 apprenticeships and to move into level 4, so we need to be able to respond to that," she said.

"The College is a Grade 1 outstanding provider and we are hoping that in the future, we might be given more trust," she said. And she backed the commitment of the next generation of Island employees to repay this trust: "There is no local shortage of motivated candidates for employers out there," she said.

For more on the College's training opportunities, watch the video on Island Business Online or visit www.iwcollege.ac.uk/default.php.

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things, sadly, that get questioned," said Sarah Edwards, "but it is really important that we keep a level of training going to support young people and businesses who need those opportunities."

Kieren Chapman, Director of UniTrain. said that while training may have dipped. businesses were still committed, albeit in a more focused way: "Companies are being more precise about what they are actually looking for and they are tending to run more bespoke courses; they are increasingly making sure that what they are investing in is tailored to their specific needs," he said.

Training for recovery

"During the last recession, everything was cut including training budgets. This time round businesses have recognised that they are going to need people to be able to carry out the work when the economy picks up, so the credit crunch hasn't hit training organisations in the service sector, in this part of the country anyway, " argued Rachael Fidler. Her view was echoed by Claire Turner, Managing Director of the Care Learning Centre in Newport, who said that Island businesses in the health and social care sector remain firmly committed to providing training.

Fidelma Washington was similarly optimistic: "There is a belief that employers will cut training in a recession. Luckily on the Island we haven't seen that; our level of bespoke courses for businesses has continued to increase, and the number of apprenticeships and Train to Gain learners we have has also increased year-on-year," she said.

But things are a little tougher in the charitable sector. "The recession has affected us fairly significantly, and as we rely heavily on fund-raising, this has restricted the number of supported places that we can provide," said the UKSA's Jon Ely. However, the charity recently received a Future Jobs Fund award of around £330,000 to help unemployed young people that fall in the NEET category (not in employment, education or training) to get back into work.

Jon went on to express the cautious hope that the charity might continue to receive this kind of help in light of the Coalition Government's new priorities: "They are very focussed on providing support to people who are out of work

The Chamber's training priorities: workplace and that special assistance Too often, training real needs of businesses.'

Kevin Smith, Chief Executive of the Isle of Wight Chamber

and therefore perhaps we've seen an increased level of new initiatives; but there is a lot of uncertainty about whether those initiatives are going to stay. I am looking for continuity and clarity; we'll join in with the programmes and develop creative training courses but what we need to know is what the future looks like," he said.

Coalition moves

With all areas of Government spending being subject to cuts or reallocation, there is a great deal of 'crystal ball gazing' across the training sector. And while Island Business spoke to a number of national bodies in the sector, very few were able to offer clear information about future funding or legislation for training

One of the things that is clear is the Coalition Government's commitment to apprenticeships. While Rachael Fidler stated, "there is no security in funding for anybody at the moment, we just have to take each day as it comes," she believes that anybody aged 16-18 remains fully entitled to their apprenticeship, "if you need to do something and want to continue your

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Pannier Market, Newport



Businesswomen Sarah Edwards is the Founder of the Regional Training and Regeneration Trust (RT2), which aims to

bring a pannier market to Newport. "Newport is a market town that needs to find its identity again and this would be a not-for profit, community-based enterprise that will champion both local retail and tourism, giving opportunities to more Island people to bring their produce direct to the market or to train as a new marketeer," explained Sarah.

"Pannier means 'large basket', and the market will provide the opportunity for traders of various sizes to attend either on a regular basis or less often, when they've got a glut of produce that they want to trade locally," said Sarah.

"Training is an important part of the project and will start very soon with marketeering programmes available for new and existing marketers. We're very keen to see a training programme that links into the construction of the permanent market place, and once that is complete, there will be training space within the market." she said.

Sarah hopes training will comprise visits by skilled artisans alongside general business-based training, which will benefit from the support of Job Centre Plus and the Isle of Wight College.

Sarah expects the scheme to provide new opportunities to young Islanders: "I am sure that there is a broad spectrum of people who would be really keen for training either as a pathway back in to work or as an adjustment to their career, or to improve their skills so that they feel secure in their workplace," she said.

For more on the pannier market, watch the video on Island Business Online; the www.iwpanniermarket.org.uk website is under construction.

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training, then apprenticeship funding is guaranteed at age 16-18," she said.

Fidelma Washington understands that Train to Gain programmes will be phased out over the next few years, with some cash diverted into apprenticeship programmes. "Apprenticeships are an absolute Government priority, particularly for 16-18 year olds, and the Government wants to look at increasing the number of apprenticeships and offering these to a higher level," she explained.

Training priorities

Kevin Smith, Chief Executive of the Isle of Wight Chamber of Commerce stated the Chamber's position in the debate about training priorities: "We believe training belongs in the workplace and that any funds and special assistance should be provided direct to businesses. "Too often, training has been about numbers and quotas, and very little to do with the real needs of businesses," he said

"Training for the unemployed will be a huge priority," according to Fidelma Washington. "Early indications suggest it will be packaged in a different way; there are quite a lot of schemes to get people back into employment and the message from ministers is that some of those will be scrapped and replaced by one single return-to-work programme," she said.

Next generation

While Andrew Turner was not able to guarantee that training would be unaffected by cuts, he expressed the hope that it would be spared the kind of swingeing Treasury cutbacks that are likely elsewhere: "I very much hope that the sorts of things that will be saved are training," he said.

"We've got some very good examples of training on the Island," said the Island MP, "I'm very pleased with the work that is going on at HTP and UKSA. And the Chamber of Commerce have been very successful with their Young Chamber initiative," he continued.

Given the current economic climate it has never been more important that the Island's high quality training providers and the committed employers who are willing to engage with them can continue to work together to develop the skills and talents of the Island's next generation workforce.

UKSA



The UK Sailing Academy (UKSA) was set up as a charity to help young people in 1986 by MFI founder Noel Lister, a

benevolent entrepreneur and keen sailor. "Some of the people who come to us are in need of a great deal of support and what we are trying to do is encourage selfesteem, confidence, and life skills that enable people to engage in society," explained UKSA Chief Executive Jon Ely.

The charity aims to provide young people with the opportunity to benefit from personal development while participating in training that will help them to gain employment in the marine sector. Jon believes this area offers great opportunities for employment, and also suits people who don't perhaps engage well in mainstream education. "We train people to work on large luxury yachts, to be water-sports instructors, and to work for people like Neilson and Mark Warner; we are training for leisure and tourism, which is the fastestgrowing sector in the country," explained Jon.

"Success for us as a charity is focused on outcomes for young people. Qualifications are great but the real outcome that we want to achieve is people in employment," said Jon. "A commercial yachtmaster course finished in April, and all of the youngsters that used our services to find employment are in employment," which is typical of the charity's success rate according to Jon.

The UKSA's Island location plays a big part in the success of UKSA's work. "We have a vibrant maritime sector on the Island: our focus is to stimulate training in that sector and show people the opportunities are really diverse, in the locality and overseas," concluded Jon.

For more on the UKSA, watch the video on Island Business Online or visit www.uksa.org.







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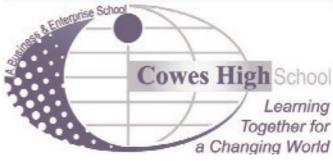


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