



Profit from Train to Gain

The Learning and Skills Council's Train to Gain programme is a 'one stop shop' to ensure businesses get access to the training they need to succeed, it says. There are three main ways the scheme operates:

Train to Gain will send one of its Skills Brokers to do a 'completely impartial, free and independent analysis to identify what is required for both now and the future'.

It will recommend the right training solutions for each business, which will not necessarily be through a Train to Gain provider.

Train to Gain will help to get the best value for money by helping to identify the best way to pay for training and suggest routes to funding via Government, EU or local sources.

There are several benefits in the Train to Gain scheme:

- Training to help employees reach their first, full level 2 NVQ is free.
- Women can access a selection of heavily subsidised level 3 NVQ courses.
- Companies with less than 50 employees may get a contribution to wage costs for time spent training.
- There is £1000 (incl VAT) available towards leadership and management training for employees with strategic responsibilities.

More information about the Train to Gain programme can be found by visiting www.traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 634 0262.

National Training Awards

The NTAs are designed to celebrate organisations or individuals that demonstrate outstanding business or personal success through investment in training.

The deadline for entries is 25 April 2008.

For more information visit: www.ukskills.org.uk or call +44 (0) 20 7612 9269.

What IS an engineer?

In its submission to the Commons Select Committee on Innovation, Universities and Skills EAMA, the Engineering & Machinery Alliance, calls for a 'new vocabulary' and a more precise definition of what is meant by the terms 'engineer' and 'engineering' so that specific issues and problems about skills and training can be targeted more clearly.

The Alliance feels, in the UK, the term 'engineer' has many different meanings, from a highly qualified research and development engineer to service, maintenance or machine operating personnel. This

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makes it difficult to focus resources on the different levels of skills required to undertake these very different functions.

As one EAMA member commented “In Germany the title Engineer is revered and someone using it has to have a university qualification. In the UK just about anyone from a university professor to a gas fitter can use the term. While both are valuable, the skill set required for each is very different and somehow the title has become devalued. This has ‘turned off’ many younger people choosing it as a career”.

The wide ranging submission looks at the role of engineers and engineering in UK society and considers that manufacturing ‘adds value’ to society and has the potential to raise living standards in ways many service jobs do not. Engineering is at the heart of the innovation process which is a key element of ‘adding value’. Good engineers are needed to boost innovation and meaningful R&D.

Also it points out that smaller companies are increasingly responsible for the technical developments and innovations which add value, yet are in danger of finding it hard to absorb all the information on which they rely to carry on this role. Companies are now simplifying their activities and concentrating on core competences with little room for focussing beyond the day-to-day issues. The part larger companies, associations and universities can play in mentoring SMEs is becoming increasingly important.

A clear message is that the basic skill levels of school leavers is woefully inadequate and the cost in time and money to companies who have to teach them to new employees is considerable and a drag on the economy. Additionally intermediate level skills lag far behind some



of our better performing competitors. Undergraduates should be exposed to the real-life work environments at an early stage, says EAMA, citing a Danish project which found it teaches better understanding and respect for the skills involved.

A survey conducted by EAMA at the end of last year revealed that 93% of participants ‘had problems recruiting the people they want at all levels’. One optimistic finding was that apprenticeships are becoming more popular again. OECD research shows that 35% of the UK workforce, between 25 and 64, is low skilled, twice as many as the best performers: USA, Canada, Switzerland, Germany and Sweden. Some 36% of the UK workforce is qualified to intermediate level, compared with 50% in Germany.

Other research disclosed that high tech jobs in EU manufacturing declined 11% between 1995 and 2005 while, in the same period high tech service jobs grew by 37%.

Overall EAMA’s recommendations echoed SEMTA (the Sector Skills Council for Science Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies) plans: more flexibility in funding provision to take account of the requirements of small firms; more help to plan for training needs (such as SEMTA’s Business Skills Model); and sectoral experts to help use the resources more effectively and ensure measurable results.

The Alliance added the caveat that until the terminology about engineering was clear any policy initiatives would remain confused. Also, if small companies are to play a full part in the skills development process larger companies and organisations need to supply information and mentoring to allow this to happen.

More information on current sources of assistance from www.semta.org.uk