



South West Policy Newsletter – June 2007

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Work experience

With the highest proportion of small businesses in England, South West members are starting to get really angry at the way 'work experience' is run in our schools.

Reports coming into the SW Policy Office refer to the way small local businesses are ignored, of work experience being just child minding to give teachers a break and how the whole set up is a waste of everyone's time.

But every time we raise the issue we are told there are some wonderful examples of very well run work experience programmes. Are there? We know of one in the Forest of Dean and that is all.

Have you been involved in work experience, either as an employer or as a parent?
What was your experience?

Are there any schools that deserve a bouquet for their programmes?

This is important as we find bouquets can be much more effective than brickbats! I look forward to hearing from you at Vivienne.rayner@fsb.org.uk

Training - At long last we are getting there!

Ever since I started working for the FSB some 8 years ago, members have been calling for 'flexible and bite-sized learning and a flexible, modular based credit qualifications framework' from publicly funded training providers. Over the period that message has slowly spread from Government White Papers to announcements and policies at SW level. But always the stumbling block has been the local FE Colleges.

At the end of May it was announced that the Association of Colleges (AOC) (FSB for FE Colleges) has joined forces with the Skills for Business Network (SBN), to improve the levels of training in businesses. Amongst other things they say they will be:-

- Developing flexible and bite-sized learning and full qualifications to meet the needs of employers and individual learners
- Ensuring a flexible, modular based credit and qualifications framework that can support different models of learning and skills training
- Reducing funding barriers and bureaucracy

The SW Policy Office would be delighted to hear of members' experiences where this is starting to happen!

WASTE – a valuable resource or expensive rubbish?

As part of our survey on 'waste' back in the autumn, 27% of members are interested in matching businesses that are able to use waste as a resource with the businesses that use it. Some members mentioned organisations like Scrapstore as invaluable in this respect.

There is an organisation called 'NISP'. They run a 'haves and wants' matching facility. Obviously quantity is an issue, but they are keen to try and help, and I would appreciate your feedback and comments.

Their website is:- <http://www.nisp.org.uk/>

This is just part of their work. Their core objective is better resource use and the facilitate resource sharing across businesses and business sectors, as well as grouping businesses together. So if you are looking to expand or change direction and resources are an issue, they may be able to help!

New CIS Tax chaos – more information

As feared, chaos has ensued on the introduction of the New Construction Industry Scheme in April 2007. HMRC has now been forced to give a moratorium on penalties until 19/10/2007. And until then, no penalties will be levied on monthly Contractor Returns that do not reach HMRC by the statutory deadline date of 19th each month.

We know of cases where Contractors have applied for paper Return forms to complete (not choosing to do them Online), but the forms did not arrive by 19/5/2007 to enable the Contractors to do this on time. These Contractors quite rightly, will not now be penalised, but it has been confirmed that the failure will count as a black mark for Contractors considering applying for gross payment status (payments to them by other Contractors without the 20% tax deduction) as this is partly based on a "clean" tax record. For this reason, and to avoid getting into expensive habits, it may be advisable to practice keeping to the deadlines wherever possible and to register to do the "paperwork" online.

Another problem has been with newly self-employed subcontractors applying for tax references (ten digit numbers). Despite earlier assurances that the process would be quick, we are now told that references may take up to a month to issue. Without a reference, tax will be deducted from earnings at 30% instead of 20% and you may have to wait more than a year to get the tax back".

The FSB Taxation team is working on these issues. Meanwhile, members are advised to check with their accountants.

The EU is closer than you think!

Members can lobby the EU through their local council!

Members of the SW Policy Unit recently visited Brussels. They were very pleasantly surprised to find that the EU is probably more open to lobbying than is our Government in London. The downside is that we have to put in the work to make them more small business friendly. So far trade unionists and others have been more successful in getting support for their point of view and we have been landed with the red tape burden as a result.

One of the unexpected findings was the importance of the UK's South West Office in Brussels. It is funded by the Regional Development Agency and local councils. It provides information and lobbies on behalf of the South West. As businesses employing fewer than 50 people employ 59% and those employing fewer than 10 employ 42% of the workforce, small businesses are very important.

FSB Regions and Branches with good relations with their local councils should be able to use them as another route to lobbying in Europe. Certainly they should be able to get information through them.

Calling all garage owners – maybe you can claim some VAT back!

If you are a garage owner, have been taking customers' cars to another garage for their MOT and had problems with the VAT man as a result, you may be able to claim some cash back.

Talk to your accountant about the case of Graeme Duncan (t/a G. Duncan Motor Services of Perth, Angus). He was assessed to pay VAT on MOTs procured for his customers, both on the Service Charge element and on the payment to the MOT Centre for the MOT itself.

Graeme Duncan successfully appealed against the HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs). This appeal was heard before the Edinburgh VAT Tribunal on Monday 12 March 2007 (case number 20100). We understand that HMRC is not going to appeal against this finding.

An FSB member in the SW went through the FSB Legal Help Line and spoke to Nigel Ferrington. The advice given, in view of the successful appeal detailed above, is for members to put in an Out of Time claim. Basically, appeals after assessment have to be made within 3 months, but in this case many people were advised that was no hope in appealing due to previously heard cases, all of which had failed.

Calling all construction Companies - There is a Construction Conference British Empire and Commonwealth Museum (Bristol Temple Meads Station) on Thursday 28 June. It will cover the 2012 Construction Commitments, Common Minimum Standards, and the 2007 CDM Regulations

For more information and details on how to book, go to <http://www.constructingexcellence.org.uk/events/eventdetails.jsp?id=1644>

Calling all ICT advisory and support services and intermediaries

"The Future of ICT Support in the South West" is a seminar being held on the 21st of June 2007 at the S-CAT centre in Taunton. It will consider recent developments in ICT support provision and delivery including Business Links IDB (Information Diagnostics & Brokerage) delivery model and the online support e-marketplace developing through the "ICT Scout" project as well as the national accreditation scheme being developed through the NCC (National Computing Centre). Microsoft will present on their new and developing products while Bristol Wireless will put their case for open source solutions.

More information and booking form via the link below

http://www.connectingsw.net/event/24/41/the_future_of_ict_support_for_business.html

And finally.....This is the South West - fly here!

FSB members around Bristol Airport are working to persuade the Airport authorities to do their bit to promote the South West as a place to visit and to do business.

In reply, they asked what we are doing.

So the answer is simple, we want the SW Airport Authorities to do their bit and promote the South West. We can help by including our local airports in the 'access' details on our websites!

Vivienne Rayner –
8th June 2007