

Ixion comment on Government funding schemes available for staff training

The Government has committed itself to the UK's long term skills needs to achieve world class skills profile by 2020. This commitment has recently been reinforced by the announcement that the UK Government will investment of £3 billion in resources for adult training, raising to £3.6 billion by the end of 2011.

With the Government's support for improving skills in the UK, it is up to SMEs to ensure that their businesses are benefiting from the funding and skills initiatives available to them.

The Small Firms Enterprise Development initiative points out that 97% of all businesses have fewer than 10 employees, yet those same employers access less than 10% of available Government skills and business budgets.

Publicly funded, free, or partly funded training can appear complicated as it can come from a variety of sources. For the uninitiated, qualification criteria can be difficult to understand.

Organisations such as Ixion, provide a gateway for businesses and individuals to access public funds and ensure that they get the money and training that they are entitled to.

Employers need to understand that by training their employees they are not losing money in the short-term, but gaining a competitive edge. A multi-skilled workforce will reduce overall staffing requirements and lead to greater staff retention, resulting in greater productivity.

Perceived cost or the time it takes to train employees can often be barriers that prevent an employer from searching for training for their staff.

To ensure they make the most off funding available to them, SMEs need to make contact with brokerage services such as Business Link or Train to Gain where they can receive help and advice on schemes or direction to other Government funded support. This is particularly important given uncertain business times and a trained workforce can give a competitive edge.

Train to Gain is a typical example of the type of funding which is administered on behalf of the Government, funded from the UK public purse.

To date, more than 72,000 employers and 160,000 employees have benefited from Train to Gain. The scheme supplies a business with a professional broker who will visit a business' premises and carry out a free organisational skills analysis.

The business' training needs are then highlighted, they are advised of the funding which is available to them and are provided with suitable training courses, at NVQ and Apprenticeship level; which can be a highly cost effective method of recruitment for SMEs allowing them to select and train someone for its specific needs.

Train to Gain skills brokers act as a conduit to help businesses access training that will provide their staff with NVQ qualifications, in a variety of areas from hairdressing

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to customer services. Assessments for NVQs are carried out in the workplace and based on real work situations that are relevant to your business.

As a key part of the skills reforms announced in the 2008 Budget, the Government will expand and improve Train to Gain, with funding rising to over £1 billion by 2011.

Business Link is also a key Government funded service open to SMEs. Over £160 million is available to support Business Link nation-wide excluding local funding.

Business Link is able to help businesses grow through providing fully subsidised business advice that is independent and impartial, on a one-to-one basis for important issues that a business is likely to encounter from basic business questions through to more complex matters as a business develops and evolves.

The service can be accessed online, over the phone or by a meeting face to face where an advisor will look at a business objectively and be able to give guidance in a number of different areas such as: finance, employment, health and safety, environment, IT and marketing.

In addition to the services offered, Business Link can refer a business to high quality and relevant specialist support to meet a business' diverse needs and ensure that it can move forward.

With different funding for training and business growth available it can be confusing. It is crucial to communicate Government funded training programmes to ensure that businesses can benefit and have access to the correct training to enhance business, and in turn their industry's reputation as a whole.

There are a number of B2B service providers such as Ixion throughout the country which can help businesses access funding and training schemes. These schemes can often be accessed through an initial call via a local contact centre. For more information please visit www.ixionholdings.com