

The Skills Pledge one year on



Have you signed the Skills Pledge yet? Hundreds of organisations have done so and the results are impressive.

Just over a year ago the Government launched, with considerable fanfare, the Skills Pledge. So how is it getting on? Well the numbers are impressive. By the time of its first anniversary, organisations covering nearly 4 million employees throughout England had made the Skills Pledge.

At root, the Skills Pledge is about changing attitudes in order to achieve action. By providing a framework for employers to 'go public' and be accountable for their commitment to learning, Skills Pledge is turning good intentions into sustained support for learning and development in the workplace.

The need for such an initiative has been clear for some time. As David Lammy, the Under Secretary of State for Skills said recently, "To fill the next generation of jobs, we need to invest in the skills of

those adults already in the workforce; the seven million who cannot add up, the near six million who don't understand the instructions on a packet of aspirin, and the 8.5 million in the workforce not at Level 2 (the equivalent of five good GCSEs). We need millions more people qualified at Level 2 and at Level 3 (the equivalent of A levels) to ensure sustainable economic growth."

The critical point is the emphasis that David Lammy puts on 'adults already in the workforce'. We cannot wait for a cohort of college-leavers and university graduates to arrive on the scene and 'save the day'. If UK business is going to cope with the big issues facing it – notably the effects of the credit crunch and the increasing competition from the emerging economies – then it has to make more (and, indeed, make the best) of the workforce it currently has on its books. That is why the Skills Pledge is vital.

Emphasis on the Individual

Although the Skills Pledge puts the responsibility on employers there are clear implications for individuals as well. Indeed, there is a growing realisation that education and training – learning at work – is not something which people undertake only at the direction of their employers. If we are to change the culture then there must also be a demand and an appetite for learning among employees. To stimulate that demand the Government announced in June a consultation into a proposed right for people to request 'time to train'. The expectation is that arising from this new right around 300,000 people a year will undertake skills training who otherwise would not do so. As the Government commented, "One third of employers do not train their staff and eight million employees receive no kind of training at all every year. Ministers believe a legal right to request time to train will help ensure that training is taken seriously by all employers."

The Skills Pledge is part of this move to ensure that training is "taken seriously by all employers." It is a simple but challenging development. Employers who make the Skills Pledge undertake a public commitment to support the development of their people through making time and resources available for learning which leads to qualifications. A 'one-to-one' analysis of need and signposting service is available from training experts to enable employers to identify the type of training which will be of real, practical value to your organisation.

The results are similar to those delivered by Investors in People in terms of employee productivity, motivation, confidence and retention and it links directly to the Standard's 'Objectives and Vision' (indicator 1) and 'Learning and Development' (indicator 2). Indeed the Skills Pledge fits perfectly with Investors in

The Skills Pledge

It is easy to make the Skills Pledge online through a simple 4-stage process. Here's how it works:

- **Making the Skills Pledge – Register with the Learning Skills Council and make your statement of commitment.**
- **Diagnostic – Tell the LSC about your organisation, and what training your organisation requires.**
- **Action Plan – Create an action plan based on those details.**
- **Skills Pledge implementation and fulfilment.**
- **Then, if you are happy with the action plan, you're ready to make the Skills Pledge and start training your workforce for success.**

For further information, telephone 0800 015 55 45 or visit <http://inourhands.lsc.gov.uk/employersSkillsPledge.html>

Note: Most Investors in People Centres are helping the Learning and Skills Council with the Skills Pledge.

People which has always been about developing people and also provides organisations with the tools to evaluate both the investment in learning and the return on investment (which the Skills Pledge does not attempt to do). When used together, Investors in People and the Skills Pledge become a very powerful combination.

It's for Everyone!

Over the past year, based on experience, there has been a slight shift in emphasis within the Skills Pledge. Initially the focus was on improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, however, as Investors in People appreciate, everyone in an organisation needs to upskill if continuous improvement is to be achieved. So since its launch in Summer 2007, there has been a change in the flavour of the Skills Pledge so that it includes everyone in the organisation. The Skills Pledge is as relevant to managers with degree level qualifications as it is to workers who have yet to achieve any qualifications.

As a result employers who make the Skills Pledge now commit themselves to:

- **actively encourage and support their employees to gain the skills and qualifications that will meet the needs of their business and will support their future employability**
- **further support their employees to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills and work towards their first full Level 2 qualification (which is the equivalent to a GCSE Grade A – C)**
- **demonstrably raise their employees' skills and competencies to improve organisational performance through investing in economically valuable training and development.**

Evidence of Success

By June this year there were about 1300 organisations which had made the Skills Pledge. Preliminary research on its impact suggests that it has been making a positive impact. Of 800 organisations surveyed who had made the Skills Pledge

- **77% of them found it easy to sign up**
- **83% said that making a public commitment to support learning had been of benefit**
- **60% had increased the breadth of their training**
- **more than one third had put in place a training plan (which they had not had previously)**
- **80%+ are likely to recommend the Skills Pledge to other organisations.**

As an example of the kind of changes that a Skills Pledge-type commitment to learning can make, the Learning and Skills Council points to Investor in People organisation, McDonald's, the hamburger chain, which has launched a new employee training programme, 'Skills for Life', in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Council. The courses are delivered online, at www.ourlounge.co.uk in order to give employees with varying shifts the flexibility to complete them in their own time. The participation rates have been impressive with 1,480 staff currently studying for over 1,800 Maths and English qualifications. McDonald's estimates that over 1,000 employees will gain basic skills qualifications in the first year of the 'Skills for Life' programme. It is those kind of dramatic results, turning round people's lives and lifting horizons through employer support, that exemplifies the benefits of the Skills Pledge. Maybe it is time you should try it?

'Time to train': How will it work?

The proposed right to request time to train would give employees a legal right to ask their employer to give them time away from their mainstream duties to undertake relevant training. The employers would then be required to consider this request seriously.

This bears a close resemblance to the legal model of the current right to request flexible working. Employers could operate for Time to Train the procedures they already have in place to manage flexible working requests.

Requests for training should relate to accredited programmes leading to a qualification, or for unaccredited training which would help individuals develop a specific skill relevant to their job. In both cases – and this is where the link with Investors in People is clear – there would be a requirement that training should help improve business performance and productivity. Employers would not have to grant a request. They could turn it down where there was a good business reason to do so, including where they did not feel that the training would help improve business performance.