

Press Release



people learn | business profits

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Boost for Businesses in Somerset

Somerset businesses are being given a boost thanks to a new £1.1 million project from Taunton based charity, Learning South West. The Think Smart project is being delivered in partnership with Sector Skills Councils, Train to Gain, local colleges and the voluntary and community sector. It is funded by The European Social Fund and The Learning and Skills Council.

Train to Gain is funding that is available to employees wanting to achieve qualifications at Level 2 and 3 at work. Think Smart supports Train to Gain by training employees to become in-house 'coaches' who help colleagues to complete vocational training courses. Think Smart will also fund and support additional qualifications not covered by Train to Gain to ensure employers can access a full range of vocational NVQs.

The coaches follow a programme called SMART Business Coaching which links the needs of the business with employees' personal and professional needs. It focuses on the key relationship between employees' well-being, how this affects their ability to learn and the impact this has on the productivity of the business.

Think Smart builds on a successful regional pilot project (Greater Expectations), managed by Learning South West, which trained 89 SMART Business Coaches who, in turn, supported 277 learners. Recent research carried out by Learning South West indicates that learners who receive coaching support are more likely to achieve qualifications.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Learning South West's Project Manager Jakki MacPhail said: "The positive impact that training can have on a business is significant. However, many employees face difficulties in completing courses and achieving qualifications. This problem is particularly acute in small businesses that can lack the infrastructure to support learners.

"Training funded through Train to Gain boosts productivity and the support employees receive through Think Smart increases staff motivation helping to make Somerset business more competitive and successful."

"Learning South West has a long and respected history of excellence in learning," added Learning South West Chief Executive Tim Boyes-Watson. "We are confident that Think Smart will have a positive impact on businesses in Somerset and support the wider economic development of the South West region."

Mark Williams, Learning and Skills Council Skills Development Director, said: "This is one of a number of important projects we are supporting through ESF that will enable employees in local businesses to improve their skills by directly funding their training or providing support if they are on Train to Gain.

"As a direct result of this project, more than 700 people who live or work in Somerset will be able to gain a Level 2 or 3 qualification. In recent years Learning South West have successfully delivered a number of projects for us, funded by ESF, and we are very pleased that they are heading the wide-ranging partnership that delivers this training."

For more information please contact Learning South West's Project Manager, Jakki MacPhail, on 01823 365437 or email jakki_macphail@learning-southwest.org.uk.

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For further information or to arrange interviews contact PROs Beth Jerrett on 07969355459 or email jerrettbeth@yahoo.co.uk or Nick Cashin on 01823 365445 or email nick_cashin@learning-southwest.org.uk

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Photo Caption:

Discussing details of the Think Smart project: from left to right Sarah Keadell of the Learning and Skills Council, Jakki MacPhail, Learning South West Project Manager and Tim Boyes-Watson, Chief Executive of Learning South West.

Notes to Editors:

- Learning South West is an independent charity, which is a cross-sector membership organisation. Our members include local authorities, further education colleges, private training providers and voluntary sector organisations. Visit www.learning-southwest.org.uk.

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