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***** Welcome to the Thanet & East Kent Insider *****

Your Weekly Business Bulletin from Thanet & East Kent Chamber

Thanet & East Kent Insider

16th October 2008

As part of our focus on Small and Medium Enterprises, this week's special edition is devoted to skills.

1. A NEET Solution

The word NEET refers to a young person aged between 16 and 25 who is not in employment, education or training. Core NEETs tend to come from deprived backgrounds where unemployment is normal. Behavioural problems and a general antipathy towards society might be transferred from generation to generation. Floating NEETs pass in and out of further education interspersed with periods in Further Education. Gap NEETs have taken a conscious decision to delay their career progression and are likely to return to work or education after a relatively short interval. In recent years, attention has focused on core NEETs which include high percentages of young people in care, teenage mothers and those with special needs. Three-quarters of the young people who appear in youth courts are NEET. There are around 55,000 young people in care; three-quarters of them leave school with no qualifications. The solution? Short term – communicate with NEETs, match their needs to those of employers. Long term – teach all children to read, write and add up competently before they leave primary education, introduce a stronger emphasis on enterprise in secondary education.

2. What The Opposition Says

David Willetts MP is the Shadow Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Speaking at the Royal Opera House in London yesterday at a British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Skills Summit, David Willetts emphasised his support for apprenticeships without the "ludicrous amounts of paperwork" that are currently required. He outlined that a conservative government would remove the £1bn budget allocated by the government for Train-To-Gain and would spend it on meaningful apprenticeships in the private and public sectors. He said that Small and Medium Enterprises would receive a bonus of £2,000 for each apprentice they trained. He explained that his family was from a long line of manufacturers. His great grandfather made gun barrels in Birmingham and he therefore had a strong commitment to supporting companies in improving the skills of their workforce. I asked him afterwards if he supported removing the marking of A-level examinations from political control in order to prevent grade inflation and restore confidence in this gold standard of the British educational establishment. He said he did support such a measure. I also asked him what his great grandfather's reaction might have been if after he had spent eleven years making gun barrels at a cost of billion of pounds of public money and then found that one in six failed to function, as this is what is currently happening in our schools where one in six school leavers cannot read, write or add up properly. He answered that it would not have been acceptable either to his ancestor or the government charged with managing the British Empire with the products of his family's factory.

3. What the Government Says

Ed Balls is the secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. In the afternoon session he referred to the raising of the school leaving age to 14 years in 1918 which was accompanied by a statement that this should rise to 18 years; a policy that fell by the wayside with the economic constraints that followed WWI. The Education Act of 1944 raised the school leaving age to 15 years and expressed a similar ambition for children to leave school at 18 years and not before. When the leaving age was raised to 16 years in 1972, yet again 18 years was mentioned as the ultimate goal. Ed Balls explained that his government would now raise the school leaving age to 17 years in 2013 and 18 years in 2015. He went on to praise the Train-To-Gain initiative as representing a "hugely important shift" in policy. From 2010, Local Authorities will assume responsibility from the Learning and Skills Council for securing a place in learning for all 16 – 19 years olds "resident in their area, whatever their circumstances". Ed Balls

explained that employers are central to the new arrangements. He saw the distinction between academic and vocational training as being outmoded and said that the government will expand the range and scope of Diplomas to include a greater content of English and Mathematics. After his presentation, I thanked Ed Balls for the Neighbourhood Renewal Funds that his government had awarded to Thanet and assured him that the money will target NEETs and will be wisely spent. I also asked him if he had plans for A-Level marking to follow the successful example of interest rates and be removed from political control. He said that the decisions on pass rates were “at arm’s length” from the government.

4. What Head Teachers Say

Chris Howard is the Vice President of the National Association of Head Teachers. In his view, many teachers are just getting used to the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years and will have difficulty in adjusting to compulsory learning to 18 years, even if much of the additional time is spent on work-based learning. He said that it was impossible to find a sufficient number of ‘super teachers’ to inspire a new generation of learners. In his view, the teaching profession mirrored many other sectors; there are a few truly inspirational individuals, the majority of teachers are competent who survive until retirement and there are a few who perhaps should have chosen another career. He added that this sobering judgement was not new and has probably been true “since the working classes were first given the vote in 1867”. Chris Howard is head of a comprehensive school in South Wales. He referred obliquely to a recent report on the ambitions of adolescent girls in the UK who aspire to winning the X Factor or marrying a Premiership footballers. In an aside, he speculated as to whether there was any justice in the Welsh Assembly Government having the same initials as the footballers’ Wives And Girlfriends, WAGs.

5. What Regional Airlines Say

Simon Witts is the Director of Safety, Quality and Training at Flybe which he describes as “Europe’s largest and most successful regional airline”. He claimed that Flybe was the first airline in the world “to train its staff in national/world qualifications”. Following the acquisition of BA Connect, Flybe operates 520 flights a day. In the last two years, Flybe has invested over £1.2bn in a fleet of Embraer 195 and Bombardier Q400 aircraft together with another “£15 million in maintenance facilities”. With 152 routes and 36 airports carrying 10m passengers a year, the training requirement is considerable. Simon Witts’s solution is to support apprenticeships at Exeter College and to run its own “silo-based” programmes at a new Training Academy. Due to its recent expansion, Flybe is looking to recruit apprentices, engineers, cabin staff and pilots. First officers can expect to earn up to £54,000 p.a. and experienced turboprop pilots £94,000 p.a.

6. What Rolls Royce Says

Graham Schumacher is head of learning services at Rolls Royce and has been involved with training since 1979. The second largest aircraft engine manufacturer in the world, Rolls Royce has an annual turnover of £4bn a year. The company invests heavily in training in managerial, professional, technical and operating skills. Graham Schumacher claimed that 50% of apprentices enter into Higher Education before reaching 30 years old. The company’s current intake of female trainees varies between 10% and 11%, but he is hoping to raise this to 20% within 4 years. When inducting apprentices, he had found it useful “to set a pace early doors” rather than to start slowly and gently increase the pressure. Critical to the success of the programmes was educating senior managers on how to work with apprentices.

7. What will happen in the next three years?

If the Conservative Party wins the next election, it is likely that the Train-To-Gain funding will transfer to apprenticeships and there will be greater participation by companies in the direction and management of post-school training. Skills Scholarships will be offered to promising apprentices to cover all their education costs in Higher Education. There will be an emphasis on the STEM sector, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, which is currently underrepresented at UK universities. If the Labour Party remains in power, the school leaving age will rise to 17 years in 2013 and 18 years in 2015. Young people aged 14 – 19 years will have four routes to continue their studies; Apprenticeships, Diplomas, Foundation Learning and General Qualifications such as GCSEs and A-Levels.

8. Who Can Train My Staff?

The following Chamber members offer training courses: Profile Development & Training, tel: 01843 869100; Thanet College Business Services, tel: 01843 605036, Canterbury Christ Church University, tel: 01227 782867, EPEC Management Services, tel: 01843 864969; Kent Scuba 01843 297430; Engee Accountancy & Credit Management, tel: 01843 599179; St John Ambulance, tel: 01732 876417; Kent Forklift Training, tel: 01843 823463.

9. Where Can I Find Out More?

The government has just published "Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps". Copies are available from DCSF Publications, tel: 0845 6022260. Quote reference 00805-2008dom-en. See also www.teachernet.gov.uk. For an employer's view, the British Chambers of Commerce produces a handy guide entitled, "Lost Talent – Not in Education, Employment of Training October 2008". For copies contact the BCC, tel: 0207 654 5800.

10. Sponsors

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