

KEEPING THE SOUTH EAST WORKING

From Recession to Recovery

In the tradition of adversity bringing people together, the recession has seen new partnerships being forged among the region's key agencies and learning providers and a renewed commitment to creating seamless, easily accessible support services for the people and businesses of the south east.

Keeping the South East Working (KSEW) is a drive spearheaded by six agencies – Business Link, Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council South East, nextstep, South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, which together form the Regional Recovery Group – and supported by a wide network of partners at local and regional level. Its aim is not only to help our people and businesses make it through these difficult days with their careers and companies intact but also to equip them with the skills to take off when the economy turns the corner.

Working together on this since late 2008, the group has developed an integrated portfolio of products and services designed to help any individual or organisation that finds themselves a casualty of the economic downturn.

That means making sure a comprehensive information and advice service, covering everything associated with work and skills, is available to everyone who needs it. It means supporting people through a potentially traumatic period. And it means funding the learning of those who need to brush up or build up their skills.

It also means providing any business in difficulty with a bespoke package of help, covering advice on the ways and means to keep trading – whether that be raising funds or honing skills and enhancing performance – and, where redundancies are inevitable, it means providing employers and their employees with a guide to the redundancy process and all that it involves.

The Regional Recovery Group's aim is to make a real difference to the regional economy and to life in the south east – and to make sure that everyone who stands to benefit from the products and services it has developed does so.

The following pages offer a snapshot of the different ways in which businesses are benefiting from the drive to keep the south east working and associated initiatives.

For the latest information on KSEW, visit keepingthesoutheastworking.co.uk



THE BEST OF HELP AT THE WORST OF TIMES

“Both organisations have been brilliant. Their help has been invaluable. I hope it will continue to be available to any organisation having to go through what we’ve been through.”

Jane King, HR Manager
Oxford Biosensors

Photo: Rob Judges

Operated by SEEDA (the South East England Development Agency) in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the Continuing Employment Support Service has been helping employers and their employees deal with the trauma of redundancy.

A University of Oxford spin-off, Oxford Biosensors was formed in 2000, its mission to research and develop a new class of portable diagnostic equipment for primary healthcare. The company’s success over the last nine years has seen its workforce grow from one to more than fifty but a recent lack of funding from investors has thrown its future into jeopardy and, when the company went into administration earlier this year, forced the redundancy of more than half its workforce.

For the company’s human resources manager, Jane King, who has been there almost from the start, the ordeal has only been ameliorated by the help she’s received from the Continuing Employment Support Service (CESS). In Jane’s own words, “The service – and the people behind it – has been fantastic. They couldn’t have been more flexible, more understanding or more supportive.”

Within an hour and a half of Jane putting in an exploratory call to Oxford Jobcentre Plus, continuing employment broker Maria Wright was calling her back, ready to step in and help by coming to talk to anyone in the company facing an uncertain future. Maria’s visit took place on the morning of the day the administrators arrived and the redundancies were announced.

The majority of the workforce, which stood at 48 and included staff ranging from directors and scientists to administrators and technicians, attended her presentation.

“Redundancy is such an emotional experience,” Jane says. “It’s almost like a bereavement, so I can’t say they left the presentation feeling very much happier, but they did leave it with all the information they could need on the redundancy process and the formalities that follow. They left it feeling a lot better prepared for the future, reassured that there was help available at every stage of the process, and with some useful advice on gaining new employment and skills.”

CESS also arranged for nextstep advisor Kerry Donnelly to deliver a very useful and well received presentation on interview skills. Kerry later returned to offer further help to the 30 members of staff who lost their jobs that afternoon with a workshop covering CV writing and skills training opportunities.

“Both organisations have been brilliant,” Jane says. “Their help is invaluable. I hope it will continue to be available to any organisation having to go through what we’ve been through.”

OCS and Asset Skills

HERE TO HELP

“I’m really pleased to have gained the NVQ. It just goes to show that it’s never too late to learn.”

Harry Racey-Brightey

The 53 employees working for international facilities services group OCS at Lymington New Forest Hospital have been the first workers in the country to achieve under a new training programme aimed at raising skills in public services. The 53 support staff, who include cleaners, caterers, porters and housekeepers, have all been awarded their NVQ level 2 in Customer Service through the Public Sector Skills Framework (PSSF).

Catherine Bowell, director of adult services for Hampshire Community Health Care, said, “It is a marvelous achievement that so many of the hospital staff managed to receive this qualification and it’s great to see continuing development regardless of age or position.”

The PSSF equips staff with skills over and above those needed for their basic role to help improve their job prospects and give increased motivation and morale. The OCS staff at Lymington who have benefited from the scheme range from teenagers to 78-year-old Harry Racey-Brightey, who cleans the hospital operating theatres. Harry said: “I’m really pleased to have gained the NVQ. It just goes to show that it’s never too late to learn.” Housekeeper Katie Bednarska added: “This has really helped give me the confidence to help customers and as English is my second language I feel especially proud.”

The nationally recognised qualification was developed with the help of Asset Skills (the sector skills council for facilities management) in a pilot funded and supported by SEEDA. Learners have been funded through the Train To Gain service. Esther Johnson, who works as a hospital housekeeper, said: “The course really helps because it makes you think more about the service you deliver,” and porter Peter Knight said: “It’s made me more alert and aware of the things that are going on around the hospital.”

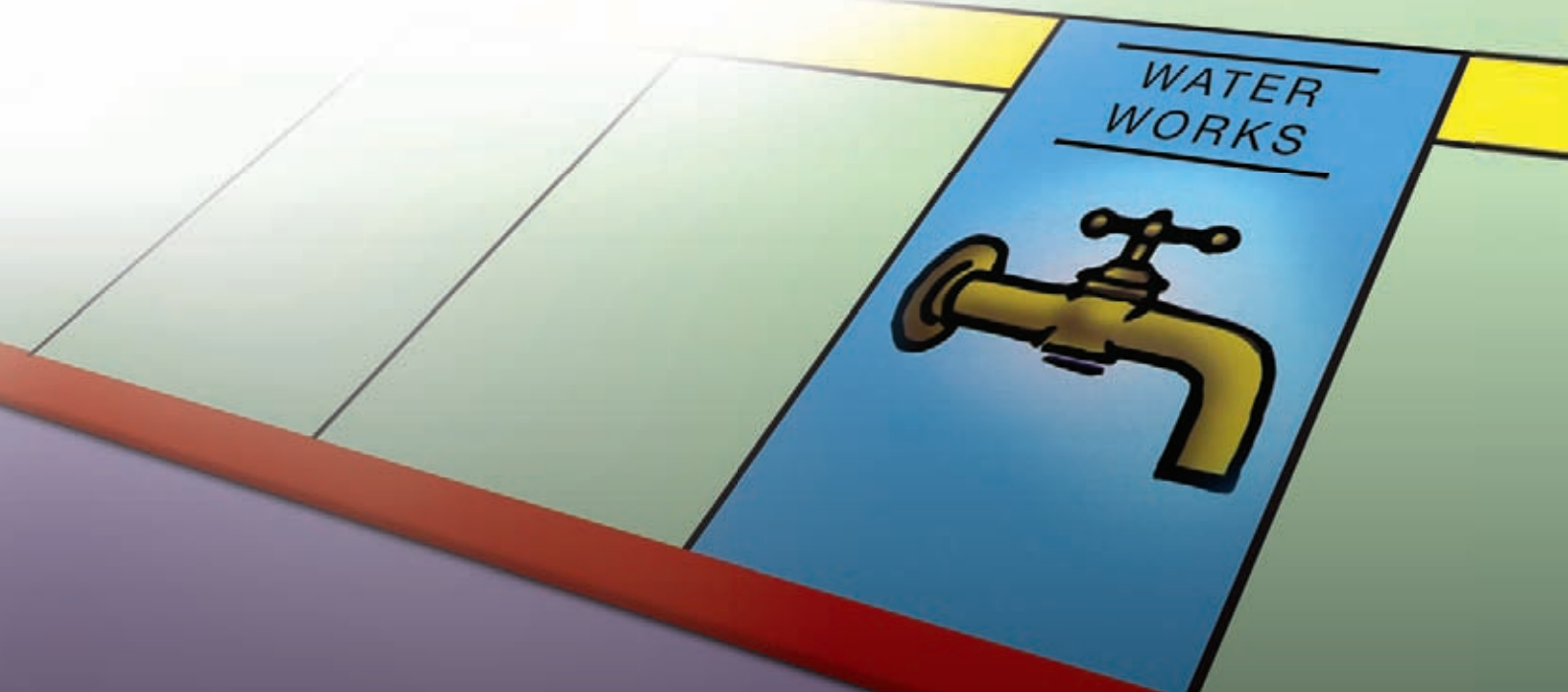
Richard Foxwell, head of special projects at Asset Skills, said, “The PSSF was started after research showed a lack of customer service skills among many frontline staff in the public sector. It will be of enormous benefit to employers in this sector and their staff.”

For many of the OCS staff this was their first nationally accredited qualification and the company has been delighted to find it giving them a taste for learning, with a number now wanting to go and do an NVQ in their technical discipline.

Lymington New Forest Hospital is a new, state-of-the-art facility and Hampshire Community Health Care’s flagship hospital.



WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE BUT NOT AN ENGINEER IN SIGHT



We all use them – water, gas, electricity – but the people with the skills to service our utilities are in increasingly short supply. The training providers catering for the sector are few and far between and with a high percentage of the utilities workforce coming up to retirement age the problem was set to worsen. Until now.

The last twelve months has seen EU Skills, the sector skills council serving the utilities industry, getting together with Morgan Est Utilities, South East Water and Sussex Downs College to strike a unique skills partnership aimed at developing world class utility training provision here in the south east.

The project was catalysed by the training needs of Morgan Est, the main network contractor for South East Water. Working on the infrastructure around the Surrey and Sussex areas, Morgan Est was in need of a local training provider but no such organisation existed. With many other organisations facing the same dilemma, EU Skills stepped in and paved the way for what their skills director, Steve Hyde, describes as a 'groundbreaking initiative', realised with the help of Sussex Downs College, where a dedicated training facility is under construction on the Eastbourne campus.

"We are at the beginning of what really is an exciting development for our industry," Steve says. "And one that wouldn't have been possible without the commitment of Sussex Downs College, which has invested heavily in the project. The impact it will have on skills training throughout the utilities sector is considerable."

The first individual beneficiaries of the project are just getting started on their training by way of a pilot comprising a cohort of 10 learners studying for their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) 2 in Water Network Construction and 10 assessors.

With the opening of the centre in Eastbourne, which is scheduled for January next year, the project will really take off. The list of new partners joining the founding few is growing all the time and as training is extended to cover the remainder of the utilities sector the number of learners, at varying levels, will be running into hundreds.

Where are all the utilities trainees going to come from?

Women and Work would like to see more women (re)training for a career in the utilities sector. Of the 530,700 people currently employed in the energy and utilities sector, only 24% are women. In an attempt to redress the balance, Women and Work has launched the government funded Sector Pathways initiative. For more info on giving or receiving training contact womenandwork@euskills.co.uk

FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH



The HR team at ARM, led by Samantha Templar (centre right) and Jacqueline Snow

In partnership with SEEDA, Business Link is recruiting SMEs to take part in a new leadership and management scheme. It offers the help of a leadership expert to identify where the needs of a business's management lie and up to £1000 to fund appropriate training or development activities. For more information call 0845 751 2288 or visit traintogain.gov.uk.

Developing our business leaders is crucial to realising our region's potential and rebuilding its economy. John Dunaway is a head of department at Advanced Resource Managers Ltd (ARM). He took part in the company's leadership training programme, which was partially funded by Train to Gain and further supported by SEEDA-funded leadership specialist Lorna Fairbairn. He talks below about the value of management development.

'I have worked for ARM for nearly five years and am currently the head of the transport and infrastructure department. I participated in the company's senior management leadership training and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The purpose of the training was to help us to develop our leadership skills. I found it to be full of new and creative ideas and innovative in the way that it was delivered. We were encouraged throughout the programme to improve the service we provide to our teams – our internal customers - in line with our business values and structure.

The work that Lorna did – the team survey and feedback - encouraged me to reflect on and apply some of the learning that I received on the leadership programme. Through the feedback from my team and guidance from Lorna, I realised that I needed to adapt my leadership style with each of them to ensure that I get the best from them. I need to understand what motivates each individual within my team, defining their personalities, goals and drivers and then make sure that I match the incentives, praise, and recognition I give to meet each of their individual needs.

Both activities were carefully aligned to the values and culture of the business. The result was a learning experience that was bespoke to the company and was both relevant and appropriate.

As a direct consequence of the leadership development programme, I have revised the business development process that my team adopts. We have now become more effective in the way we:

- target and qualify clients
- understand client needs
- build essential relationships
- deliver our services.

My team has increased in size from 4 to 13 and I know that I have improved the way that I manage them. I now have a sense of the overall strategic focus of the business and this informs all of the work that I do. I am a better coach and mentor to my team and am able to motivate them more effectively. I still refer to the training materials we were given and developed during the programme and find them to be valuable to my continued growth as a leader.

I take less direct control now and have empowered my team to improve their performance. We have seen growth in sales and profits as a direct consequence of the team's improved performance and the service to our customers has improved'.

SEGRO plc

SKILLING UP AT THE OFFICE... THE FACTORY, THE WORKSHOP, THE WAREHOUSE



One of the the best known trading estates in the country, Slough Trading Estate is set to have a new claim to fame in the shape of Slough Aspire, an innovative skills training centre expecting to cater for up 10,000 learners in its first five years.

The project has been developed by the estate's owner, SEGRO plc, to cater not only for the training needs of the 17,000 or so people working on the estate but also for those of the wider community. This exciting initiative is a key element of SEGRO's £600m proposal for the estate.

The hub of the project – the Slough Aspire Centre – will sit at the heart of the estate and provide a base for learning providers to come together to deliver new training opportunities for local people and businesses.

Partners to date include Lynch Hill and Westgate schools, East Berkshire College, Thames Valley University and the Education Business Partnership. Their work will be coordinated by a dedicated skills manager, who will be working to strengthen the links between businesses and learning providers and help implement solutions to people of all ages and across all industry sectors. The centre will offer a mix of work-based learning and classroom-based activities and provide onsite careers advice.

Three interlinked projects in one, it incorporates:

Slough Aspire for Business – a demand led initiative responding directly to the needs of local businesses;

Slough Aspire for Schools – designed to develop and harness the ambitions and aspirations of young people through an innovative outreach programme;

Slough Aspire for You – a range of development opportunities aimed at furthering careers and helping the unemployed get back into work.

The initiative has been designed to help deliver the 20-year development plan for Slough Trading Estate – Vision for the Future – which will transform the estate and make sure that it continues to adapt to the changing demands of business.

Slough Aspire aims to position Slough as leading the way in the future of skills training.





Denne Construction and ConstructionSkills

THE FULL MONTY

“Denne Construction has set the standard for integrating training and development within a major construction project.”

Christina Montague
Strategy Advisor, ConstructionSkills South East

For most construction companies changing the face of the built environment would be enough. For Denne Construction, the main contractor for the regeneration of Stanhope Estate in Ashford, that is only part of the package. Denne's commitment to providing employment opportunities and skills training for local people is changing the face of life on the estate.

With the ongoing help and support of ConstructionSkills (the sector skills council for the construction industry) Denne has set up the first training centre in the south east to be accredited by the National Skills Academy for Construction and the first such centre in the UK to be based on a housing estate. The project, commissioned by Ashford Borough Council, comprises the refurbishment of the 325 council-owned properties on the estate and the construction of 442 new houses on 10 different sites over a five year period, together with the improvement of communal spaces and the building of new community facilities.

Committed to working in partnership with the local community, Denne has built strong links with the area's secondary schools and the further education (FE) sector and developed a successful model of supporting young people in education move into Apprenticeships.

In the first year of the project, every one of the FE students who did a work placement through the centre went on to take up an Apprenticeship with Denne or one of the company's supply chain – and 65 members of the workforce at the Stanhope site achieved a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) through the on-site skills centre.

Living in (Stan)hope

“Being on the dole – ‘specially when you know what it is you want to do – is really soul destroying.”

Lifelong Stanhope resident Lee Rand left school with the ambition of becoming an electrician but without the qualifications he needed to realise it. Twice turned down by his local college, Lee picked up the odd stint of casual labouring but typically filled his days hanging out with unemployed friends, his ambition of learning a skilled trade becoming ever more remote.

The arrival of the Skills Academy, where the training centre sits at the heart of the construction site, presented Lee with another chance. Chivvied along by his granddad, Lee paid the centre a visit and met with the training coordinator there, Zoe Dalton, who looked beyond his lack of basic qualifications to his genuine enthusiasm for electrical work. With her help, Lee was offered a trial position with the site's electrical contractor, Finefix, as an electrician's mate. It gave him a foothold in the business and the opportunity to show his aptitude. At the third time of trying, Lee got his college place. Now in the second year of a four-year City & Guilds qualification Lee is doing well, attending South Kent College one day a week and working four-days a week for Finefix, and on course to realise his ambition.

The benefits for the local community are clear but local people are not the only beneficiaries. Nicholas Fowler, business development manager at Denne, says: “One of the most significant business benefits to our approach is the value many of our clients place on us supporting the communities we work in; it also helps the company to develop closer working relationships with our contractors; and the culture of training on site has been hugely beneficial to the project.”

It perhaps goes without saying that Denne, whose training partner in the project is South Kent College, is also making a great job of developing much needed skilled people across every construction industry trade.

BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES:

who's who and what's what



- Initiates first employer contact (in redundancy situations).
- Provides benefits advice and guidance, job search and employment advice to support affected workforces.
- Manages Rapid Response Fund interventions.

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk



Leading learning and skills

- Monitors redundancy and downturn support in local areas.
- Identifies, reviews and funds skills provision to support businesses and individuals, including Train to Gain and Apprenticeships.

www.lsc.gov.uk



- Provides information, advice and support to start, maintain and grow businesses.
- Helps businesses to understand their needs and refers them to the most appropriate support from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

www.businesslink.gov.uk/southeast



Working for England's World Class Region

- Provides the strategic lead for the regional response to the downturn.
- Identifies and co-ordinates relevant funds and programmes.
- Supports sub regional partnerships.
- Funds and delivers Business Link in the South East.

www.seeda.co.uk



- Works with Government and its agencies to test out plans from an employer perspective.
- Provides advice and guidance on opportunities and support available to companies.
- Signposts employers to options relating to skills and productivity.

www.sscalliance.org.uk



- Provides face-to-face information, advice and support to individuals on learning and work.
- Provides practical employability workshops.
- Helps individuals identify transferable skills, strengths and training needs.

www.nextstepsoutheast.org.uk