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Training in the Current Economic Climate

A survey, carried out by the Learning and Skills found, unsurprisingly, that 57% of the country’s workers are worried about their job prospects. It also found that 51% would be concentrating on training to improve their careers and job security. The current economic climate seems to be inspiring people to rethink their career paths in a positive way, with over three-quarters of respondents recognising that there was room for improvement in their skill levels and indicating a willingness to seek advice about improving their skill base.

Unfortunately, training is often seen by companies as a soft savings and so delivering this additional training can be difficult. Organisations need to be aware of the range of support available from the Government. Skills Minister, Lord Young said, “It is more important than ever that people have the opportunity to improve their skills to help them in the workplace. We are investing over £4 billion in further education and skills this year alone and the Government is committed to making sure that everyone has the opportunity to gain new skills.”

The Government’s new Opportunities White Paper announced an increase in the number of career development loans. These are available for people who want to undertake training, develop their skills and realise their full potential. By 2010/11 over 45,000 rebranded Professional and Career Development loans will be available. For more information go to www.directgov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning

The Government will also fund an additional 35,000 apprentices next year to strengthen the country’s competitiveness and help beat the downturn. Over a quarter of a million apprentices are expected to begin their training in the next

financial year. For many people an apprenticeship will provide a high quality route into a skilled job and the additional funding will extend the opportunities so that even more people can benefit from on-the-job training in skilled professions. For more information go to www.dius.gov.uk

A new fund has also been established by the Government to help people who have lost or fear losing their jobs. This will be used to make it easier and quicker for people to get advice on careers and work related training helping them find secure jobs. The money will enable Train to Gain providers to deliver a holistic package.

For those involved in quality, who want to strengthen their skills, the Chartered Institute of Quality offers a Certificate in Quality – a one year course and a Diploma in Quality – equivalent to a degree qualification. These can be studied by day release or by distance learning. For further information please visit www.thecqi.org

Energy Efficiency Standard

A new ISO Standard has been released that should help the building sector contribute to energy saving by providing it with specific design guidelines. *ISO 23045:2008 Building environmental design – Guidelines to assess energy efficiency of new buildings* provides energy-related requirements for the design process, or to achieve targeted values of energy efficiency for new buildings.

Mr Stephen Turner, leader of the ISO group that developed the standard, said, “Today’s worldwide increase in efforts toward rational use of natural resources is increasing the markets for energy-efficient buildings and building equipment. The building sector holds great prospects for energy saving through the design of buildings with improved thermal performance and increased efficiency of mechanical equipment, as well of course through the entire range of buildings’



lifecycles. The ISO 23045:2008 will help the building sector design buildings to a specified level of efficiency. It is an invaluable addition to the growing group of ISO standards for building environment design organised within the framework of ISO 16813.”

The standard should help in;

- Collecting and providing information regarding the energy efficiency of the building under consideration
- Conducting the iterative process to ensure improved energy efficiency of buildings
- Obtaining the target values for energy efficiency ratios used in labelling or information to public or/and consumers

For more information, please visit www.iso.ch

Data Protection Standard

Comments are being invited on a draft standard for the management of personal information. It is a management standard that provides a framework for an organisation to effectively manage personal information. It uses the familiar Plan-Do-Check-Act format from other management standards. The public review process for DPC BS 10012 closes on 31 March and the draft can be viewed at www.bsigroup.com/drafts.

Business Health Checks

Is your organisation ready to cope with the current economic downturn? Firms are being urged to have a business ‘health check’ to find out if they are ready. The ‘health check’ is provided by the Government’s Business Link service and ensures that firms are maximising their cash flow, marketing and business planning during the current economic climate. Over 10,000 businesses across the UK have already taken the opportunity of these free Business Health Checks since the initiative was first launched at the end of last year.

The Business Health Checks provide firms with qualified Business Link experts to help draw up tailor made action plans designed to shore up their businesses and avoid the potential pitfalls of the economic downturn. Business Link also

provides a follow up monitoring services to ensure that their plan is working for them.

Business Link Advisor Ganesh Selvarajah said, “Smart businesses review their performance regularly to look for early signs of any issues that will affect their profitability. The Health Checks are a really effective way of doing this. Clients find that they give them an excellent overview of the strengths they need to build on as well as identifying potential problems, such as cash flow”.

For further information, please visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/businesshelp

New Patents Website

January saw the launch, by the Intellectual Property Office, of two new patents databases on its website. One contains all patents in force in the UK which are endorsed Licence of Right, and are therefore open for licensing. The other contains all UK patents which are no longer in force, and therefore contains inventions which are no longer protected here.

Sean Dennehey, Assistant Comptroller and Director of Patents, said, “The introduction of these two new free databases, which were recommended in the Gowers Review, will we hope, give UK businesses ready access to good ideas and new opportunities.”

The new databases can be found at <http://www.ipo.gov.uk/p-di-licenceofright.htm>

Safer skiing

There is now a new ISO standard for touring ski boots – this aims to make sure that the enjoyment of ski-touring is not marred by unsafe products. *ISO 9523:2008, Touring ski-boots for adults – interface with touring ski-bindings – Requirements and test methods* specifies the dimensions and characteristics of the interface, requirements, test methods and marking of ski-boots with a rigid sole which are used with current systems of touring ski-bindings with attachment at the boot toe and boot heel.

For further information, please visit www.iso.ch



Top ten jobs

New wheelchair standard

A new ISO standard show how to measure the ability of electrically powered wheelchairs, including scooters, to safely climb and descend obstacles such as kerbs, door thresholds and changes in pavement height. *ISO 7176-10:2008, Wheelchairs – part 10: Determination of obstacle-climbing ability of electrically powered wheelchairs* specifies requirements for test equipment and outlines test procedures for these types of measurements.

Dev Banerjee, Chair of the committee that developed this standard, said, “This new standard will help users select the most appropriate wheelchair where the obstacle climbing is important for access and safety. The tests included in this standard will provide very useful information for both operators and prescribers of wheelchairs, and will facilitate the comparison of products manufactured and sold un different countries.”

For further information, please visit www.iso.ch

New Research Centre

A new national research centre for food and the environment has been announced. The **Food and Environmental Research Agency (FERA)** will bring together Defra’s Central Science Laboratory, Plant Health Division, Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate and the Plant variety Rights Office and Seeds Division as one research agency. It officially comes in to being on 1 April 2009, although it has been operating in shadow form since April 2008

Adrian Belton, new Chief Executive of FERA, said, “FERA puts Defra at the heart of the debate on food security and the science behind environmental issues. By combining policy development, scientific evidence and risk assessment FERA can play a full role in addressing challenges in the natural environment”

For further information, please visit www.csl.gov.uk

The Learning and Skills Council survey mentioned earlier also revealed the jobs that British people would like to do if they had the chance in the current climate. The top ten choices were:

1. Travel Writer
2. Zookeeper
3. School teacher
4. Taste Tester
5. Test Driver
6. Garden Designer
7. Costume Designer
8. Florist
9. Run fishing trips in the Caribbean
10. Scuba Diving Instructor

For further information, please visit www.lsc.gov.uk