

# Training consortium: Time to hire apprentices is now

WBTC business development coordinator outlines the mutual benefits of apprenticeships

WITH 40 years in the business West Berkshire Training Consortium (WBTC) has helped more than 15,000 apprentices in their career journeys.

According to senior business development coordinator Rachel Eaves, now is the "key time to start recruiting".

Irrespective of whether a candidate has left university or school to pursue other avenues, WBTC provides a variety of services in a bid to place each person where they are 'best fit'.

"There are a wide range of apprenticeship opportunities available for school and college leavers and increasingly graduates," says Rachel.

"It is a really buoyant time of year, busy with people considering their options."

The fusion of "exceptional market knowledge", "a great team" and decades of "building relationships with schools" makes WBTC "stand out" from the rest.

Unlike its national competitors, Rachel says the company adopts a distinctive and personal approach based on "nur-



Rachel Eaves

ture" its clients and maintaining positive relationships.

Rachel commented on the continuity which has come from long-term relationships built.

"In my 14 years of being with [WBTC], and I know prior to my time, we have found that many employers we are recruiting for were actually West Berkshire Training Consortium apprentices at one time themselves.

"These people make brilliant mentors and it is so great to go out and speak to them and say 'I remember [WBTC]

from when I started out as an apprentice'."

Rachel said that being present and serving businesses in the district for 40 years has made the training consortium the first stop for both local employers and those seeking to begin apprenticeships.

"The reason people come back to us, is us," she stated as she described how she tailors experience to each individual.

"My role is to get to know the candidate. I see if they are a good match for each unique professional environment and match accordingly.

"It is nicer than just recruitment, it is about getting the match and career pathway thing for each person and business, it's a long term relationship."

WBTC works across a number of apprenticeships and with a range of employers, covering areas such as administration, customer service and warehousing, team leaders and managers as well as engineering, digital marketing, IT and teaching assistants amongst others.

Rachel says the organisa-

tion strives to create a unique partnership between candidates and individual business' needs.

Rachel said there are "brilliant progression routes" from an employer's perspective because a business can capture someone who may not have attended university but acquires the relevant skills that the company is seeking.

It enables the business to build and enhance their workforce. Apprenticeships are not only for new employees at the start of their career but can also be used to upskill current employees and are available across a number of levels.

WBTC also provides a "full recruitment service" and independent advice guidance.

Rachel added: "It is all about supporting each apprentice and employer to make sure they know exactly what is required of all parties involved and the process to follow."

She added: "All our employers become 'members' of WBTC and as a result have access to a range of short courses for all their staff such as first aid and health and safety, as

well as other business skills such as time management and managing change."

From assessing a candidate's skills and goals to a business' environment and specifications, the consortium seeks to create partnerships that last, supporting all those involved from the candidates to the employers and mentors.

In addition to the support given to apprentices and their employers, a "well-received" graduation and awards ceremony takes place once a year, which is a way to recognise and celebrate achievements.

WBTC also offers traineeships through its 'Great Start' programme, which provides upskilling such as work skills, work placement and an opportunity to achieve English and mathematics.

It can also offer functional skills, fully funded, for those aged 19 and over who have not yet achieved their Level 2 in English and maths.

For more information, contact Rachel Eaves at Rachel@wbtc-uk.com or interim executive director Claire Richards at claire@wbtc-uk.com

## How firms were helped in pandemic

A PROGRAMME of activity to help the district recover from the Covid pandemic distributed millions of pounds to businesses.

A Recovery Strategy closure report was presented to West Berkshire Council's executive last Thursday.

A recovery strategy was published and approved in June 2020 which put the economy central to the district's recovery.

This has delivered support for businesses in a number of ways, including:

- 450 firms benefitted from £6.5m in Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG) – helping them cope with the impact of pandemic restrictions.

- This includes 44 receiving a share of a £700,000 ARG Challenge Fund – ARF funding aimed at supporting environmental and digital recovery.

- Thirty people attended a course to provide support for people wanting to start their own business.

- This was delivered by Rebel Business School thanks to a £5,000 investment.

- Twenty-nine young people were assisted in getting Kickstart placements.

Advice was given to an additional 50 to 60 West Berkshire businesses to help them apply to Kickstart directly.



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Newbury MP Laura Farris, centre, and other speakers at the event in Parliament

## MP praise for Vodafone values

NEWBURY MP Laura Farris hosted an event in Parliament with Vodafone on women in work.

Vodafone consistently ranks as one of the best employers for women in the UK and has been a supporter to Mrs Farris in her work as co-chair of the Women & Work APPG, a position she held alongside Labour MP Jess Phillips.

The event focused on the recruitment, retention and development of women in the workplace and featured speeches from Mrs Farris, Mrs Phillips, Nicki Lyons from Vodafone UK, employment minister Mims Davies MP and

Sonya Barlow, founder of the LMF Network, a global project dedicated to helping women into business.

This year, Vodafone was once again recognised in *The Times* Top 50 Employers for Women list.

Following the July 5 event, Mrs Farris said: "I am proud that one of the principal employers in my constituency shares my values about female employment and the value and necessity of supporting their retention in the workplace."

"Together with my friends and colleagues Jess Phillips MP and Mims Davies MP, the event was an important

opportunity to meet women from many walks of life and professions and discuss the practices and policies that support their advancement – both in the workplace and in law."

Vodafone corporate affairs and sustainability director Nicki Lyons said: "We were delighted to have Laura host today's event supporting talented women."

"At Vodafone, supporting women at all stages in their career is something we take incredibly seriously."

"We're grateful to have such a knowledgeable advocate for women in the workplace as our Newbury MP."