

Meet WBTC apprenticeship business development team

Rachel and Karen make recruiting a quality apprentice or upskilling existing staff seamless

AS the go-to apprenticeship provider for Newbury and the surrounding areas – West Berkshire Training Consortium (WBTC) can attribute much of its success to its incredible team of staff and assessors who make recruiting and supporting an apprentice look easy.

This is where apprenticeship business development team – Rachel Eaves and Karen Dodd – come into play, as the front-line team dealing with employers, prospective apprentices, schools and parents.

As interest in apprenticeships grows, it's Rachel and Karen who unpick the process and make recruiting a high-quality apprentice or upskilling your existing staff a seamless exercise.

Karen joined WBTC more than four years ago and is responsible for handling the large employers who want to use their apprenticeship levy to build and maintain a pipeline of apprentices to ensure business continuity and

growth.

She has a background in employer engagement, having worked as an account manager for the chamber of commerce and has a depth of knowledge about the key requirements of different industries.

She talked about her role, saying: "I deal with those large organisations who are paying into the apprenticeship levy.

"My time is spent advising how they can utilise their funds to upskill staff or recruit new apprentices into the business."

Karen has built strong and lasting relationships with employers who value her dedication and commitment to helping them onboard new apprentices.

Outside work she likes to spend time walking her two rescue dogs and volunteering with the local food bank.

The other half of this dynamic team is Rachel, whose role is to work with smaller employers who make up the majority of the employer base in the local area.

She ensures the small to



Rachel Eaves and Karen Dodd from WBTC

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medium employers fully understand the apprenticeship programme and how the training (which combines on the job training for four days per week with one day at WBTC or college, depending on the apprenticeship), works in the long term.

Rachel also deals directly

one involved in the process understands how it works."

She has more than 13 years with WBTC so is completely in tune with local employer needs. This is reinforced by her previous roles in recruitment, dealing with the staffing requirements of a wide range of industries.

WBTC interim executive director Claire Richards outlined how pivotal both women are to the day-to-day success of WBTC and its employers and apprentices.

She said: "We are so lucky to have Karen and Rachel. Their professionalism and commitment to supporting our clients to secure the best talent for their teams and develop existing staff is second to none.

"They are at the heart of WBTC and I am so proud to be leading such an inspirational organisation."

For more information about apprenticeships and how WBTC can support you or your organisation, contact Rachel@wbtc-uk.com or Karen@wbtc-uk.com or visit wbtc-uk.com

Business confidence on the rise

BUSINESS confidence in the South East rose 19 points during April to 30 per cent, according to the latest Business Barometer from Lloyds Bank Commercial Banking.

Companies in the region reported higher confidence in their own business prospects month-on-month, up 24 points at 41 per cent.

When taken alongside their optimism in the economy, up 15 points to 19 per cent, this gives a headline confidence reading of 30 per cent.

South East businesses also flagged a range of growth opportunities for the next six months, including evolving their offering with new products or services (34 per cent), investing in their teams (33 per cent) and diversifying into new markets (20 per cent).

A net balance of 22 per cent of businesses in the region expect to increase staff levels over the next year, up 13 points on last month.

Overall UK business confidence remained unchanged during April, at 33 per cent.

Firms' outlook on their future trading prospects rose five points to 39 per cent, but their optimism in the economy dipped slightly on March's reading (down from 32 per cent to 26 per cent).

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SMEs show optimism for the year ahead

MORE than half of small to medium enterprises expect their turnover to increase over the year despite economic challenges, according to Newbury accountants.

The findings feature in the latest Azets SME Barometer report, compiled by Top 10 accountancy firm Azets, which has an office at Elizabeth House in London Road.

Kevin Walmsley, regional managing partner for Azets, said: "Despite gloomy economic headlines, many firms appear to be relatively bullish about future prospects.

"Like our preceding barometer, the findings once again demonstrate the strength and resilience of local businesses."

The firm surveyed nearly 1,100 clients in the UK and Nordic countries and, according to the report, 62 per cent expected their turnover to increase in the next 12 months.

Business models, digitalisation and the economy represent the 'biggest opportunities'.

More than half (54 per cent) say they will increase digitalisation in the year ahead, with cyber-security, data analytics, remote working, e-commerce and process automation ranking as top priorities.



Azets regional managing partner Kevin Walmsley

One the flip side, cost inflation is the largest day-to-day worry, along with recruitment – two-thirds find hiring the right people with the right skills challenging.

On the environmental front, nearly three-quarters are not focused on reducing carbon footprints. Just under half of respondents confirmed they do not have the competencies to address ESG – environmental, social and governance – to safeguard their businesses from future risks.

Expertise, time, cost and supply chain due diligence are among the biggest challenges in relation to ESG.

Covid-19 remains a major threat, from staffing to supply chain issues, and 16 per cent of SMEs in the UK have experienced a cyber-attack or serious data breach.

The findings were collated

before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Mr Walmsley said: "Despite the understandable negative sentiment, and economic optimism dropping from our previous and first barometer, it is clear from our latest barometer that 62 per cent expect their turnover to increase, with 53 per cent forecasting improved profits.

"Marked by another year of the pandemic and its associated effects, and the harrowing Ukraine crisis, business leaders continue to remain stoic, pivoting their business models and proving why they continue to be the backbone of our economies."

Other challenges for companies were also referenced, such as price fluctuations on commodities, due to the international situation, and global supply chain disruptions.