

People 1st — at the heart of the skills agenda in Scotland

Who is People 1st? What do they do for me? Do I need to be involved with them? All good questions, but what are the answers?

Put simply, People 1st is the employer-led organisation at the heart of the skills agenda in Scotland and the UK for the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector.

Some seven months ago we were licensed by the government as the Sector Skills Council for these industries. We exist to reduce skills gaps and shortages, by improving business productivity and profitability and individuals' employability. Most importantly we are the vital link between government, business and the learning community. Central to this is helping the sector to become a beacon of best practice. To assist in achieving these objectives there is a team of people based throughout the UK with three based here in Scotland.

People 1st recently staged its inaugural conference at the London iMax. The event was extremely well received, with an audience of over 250 from industry, the learning community and the skills bodies. Hosted by Fiona Armstrong, the conference featured key note speeches from the Minister of State, Department for Education and Skills, Dr Kim Howells, as well as contributions from the Tourism Minister, Richard Caborn and Digby Jones, Director General of the CBI. The conference also served as a platform to introduce Brian Wisdom, the first permanent CEO of People 1st.

It was a rare opportunity to bring together key industry players to form a consensus on the skills challenges facing our businesses. An interactive voting system was used to poll the audience's views throughout the day, which identified "the coordination of industry, government policy and education and training" as the single most important barrier to progressing skills development in the sector.

The industry has been discussing these skills challenges for years, but now is the time for action and that's why People 1st has been set up. For the first time, all of the bodies involved in the delivery, funding and consumption of vocational skills development are talking the same language. People 1st will be **your voice** in the debate.

Like all of our 20,000 employers in Scotland, you want to succeed. To succeed by making more money. We believe that this success can come through improving skills, not as an end in itself then, but as a means to making business more profitable and productive. As such it's our job to demonstrate that an investment in the skills of your people can bring that success.

It's a difficult equation to prove but through example, case study and endorsement we need to do just that — so we need you to get involved. Tell us about your needs and experience of investing in skills training. Then we can start to deliver by:

- ◆ representing your views
- ◆ providing the information you need
- ◆ helping you to secure appropriate funding

- ◆ ensuring qualifications are developed that are fit for purpose
- ◆ directing you towards the training and providers that best meet your needs

A skills 'one stop shop' if you like. Whatever your skills needs, People 1st can help you or can direct you to others who can help. Our intention is not to reinvent the wheel but to make the wheel work for you!

In a nutshell, we are here to help individual businesses and the sector as a whole be the best it can be, by getting more employers training and better training for employees.

The world hasn't stood still awaiting our arrival. There's been a skills improvement need for some time and others in different ways are trying to meet that need, though none I would argue focus as we do.

We recognise that to provide a full range of services to meet industry's skills needs we need to work very closely with key partners, both nationally and regionally. I am very pleased to say that we have signed a number of Memoranda of Understanding with UK organisations to formally acknowledge these relationships.

In addition, and specifically, in Scotland we have:

- ◆ worked with SQA to complete a review of HNC and HNDs as they apply to our industry — to start addressing the fact that 21% of our employees have no post school qualifications
- ◆ undertaken a review of the myriad of vocational qualifications which employers have said to us that they find confusing. Our aim is to work with SQA and make the VQ's more meaningful to all
- ◆ increased the number of Over 25 Apprenticeships by 200
- ◆ increased the number of Modern Apprenticeships by 23%
- ◆ promoted the skills issues and consulted with nearly 200 employers and agencies to ensure we know what you need from us

However, talking is not sufficient — action is required but not just from People 1st but from YOU as well.

So what are we asking from you?

Ask yourself, if you want to generate more income, how can your staff help you to do that and specifically what extra skills do they need to do their jobs better? Take a good look at the provision of training and skills within your business. Is there room for improvement? If so, how are you going to go about making that change?

And if you are already focusing on skills, do you promote this as a company virtue to customers, investors and potential employees alike?

We believe that you should. And we're ready and able to help. Call us on 0131 624 4040, or visit our website at www.people1st.co.uk.

Get involved with People 1st and help us to make this sector the best it can be.