

Survey reveals literacy problem for business

Around one-third of businesses have experienced difficulties with reading, writing and basic maths among their staff, a monthly internet survey run by the Institute for Enterprise and Innovation at The University of Nottingham has revealed.

The national Skills for Life Strategy was set up in 2001 in response to the Moser report A Fresh Start. The ultimate aim was to help improve the literacy and numeracy achievement of 1.5 million adults by 2007.

However, five years later and 38 per cent of respondents to the UK Business Barometer have said they have encountered literacy problems among their employees frequently or relatively frequently, while 30 per cent said the same of numeracy problems. In its sister survey, the UK Business Adviser Barometer, 30 per cent of advisers have had these topics raised frequently or relatively frequently by clients.

At the other end of the scale, 45 per cent observed few or no literacy problems while 56 per cent had encountered few or no numeracy problems. In the UKBAB, 49 per cent said they had encountered few or no problems with literacy or numeracy training concerns.

Almost half of the businesses surveyed (43 per cent) felt that the Government should provide basic skills training for employees.

The two surveys also quizzed businesses and advisers about the National Minimum Wage, which increased again from October 1. They found that the rise in pay will deter only a minority of survey respondents from recruiting younger staff — more than half (54 per cent) said it would not make recruiting younger staff less attractive, compared with 43 per cent when the same question was posed to them in October 2004.

The October UKBB survey also sought panellists' views on the Royal Mail's new tariff, R&D tax credits, employment legislation, multiple suppliers and unpaid invoices. In addition, respondents to the UKBAB were asked about time management, clients' notions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), skills course design, skills bartering and work experience placements.

The UK Business Barometer (UKBB) and UK Business Adviser Barometer (UKBAB) operate over the web to generate very rapid results. The survey software enables results to be processed and posted on their respective websites in real time.

The survey results are published monthly and more information, including a press pack, can be found on the web at www.ukbb.ac and www.ukbab.ac Businesses and advisers wishing to contribute as panellists on the project should visit the appropriate Business Barometer website to register.

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