

Political Monitor for IRC

Week commencing 23rd August 2010

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Westminster

Government

'Cafe Culture' style learning backed by Government



Skills minister John Hayes has this week supported plans to promote informal training in the workplace. After success of such a scheme in 11 big FTSE 350 companies – including McDonald's Restaurants, Microsoft, Google and Barclay's Bank among others – there are plans to promote the practice to other organisations in '**Building the Cafe Culture Movement**'.

The call comes after a 'Cafe Culture' campaign run by **Business in the Community**, part of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, together with 11 big FTSE 350 companies. It is hope that by translating a more relaxed approach to training in finance, manufacturing and food and drink service sectors, employers will be able to support creativity and employees have the opportunity to share skills.



Mr Hayes said: "Businesses have a pivotal role in promoting adult learning, and so have a unique opportunity to change, and indeed improve, people's lives. In turn they can reap the harvest of a productive and engaged workforce.

"The many household names that have pledged to push informal workplace learning through the Café Culture campaign is testament to the value they place on developing new skills. I am delighted to see such positive results and look forward to seeing adult learning continue to grow at work."

Industry's ideas for growing and eating more fruit and veg



Members of the fruit and vegetable industry have presented ideas for increasing production and consumption of fruit and vegetables in England.

The report, by the industry-led Fruit and Vegetable Task Force, includes proposals for action by industry, as well as ideas for the Government to consider. They identify four targets to encourage people to eat more fruit and vegetables:

- making produce more available and more convenient;
- providing value for money;
- maintaining a high standard of quality and taste; and
- building up a competitive supply base and an efficient supply chain.

Welcoming delivery of the Task Force's report, Food Minister **Jim Paice** said:

"We produce some of the best fresh food that you can buy, right here in England. We can't grow all the fruit and vegetables people want to eat, but increasing consumption and increasing home production is not just good for people's health, it will develop the market opportunities and the confidence of our growers.

"It's a Government priority to support and develop British farming and encourage sustainable food production, and I am grateful for the experience and insight of the Task Force in producing this report."

The Task Force was asked to put forward practical proposals for action, their response focuses on:

- Removing regulation;
- Sustaining R&D capability;
- Improving skills and attracting new entrants in to the industry;
- Encouraging collaboration;
- Improving supply chain relationships;
- Expanding market opportunities;
- Improving existing Government behaviour change campaigns;
- Encouraging industry promotions;
- Aligning VAT with the 5 A Day objective; and
- Supporting Grow Your Own.

Defra will support the Fruit and Vegetable Task Force in developing its action plan. Defra will discuss with the relevant departments the Task Force's proposals which concern other Government departments, taking into consideration wider policies and contexts including practicality and cost.

Stakeholder

Bank receives \$10m investment to boost Scottish business

Lanarkshire's **Airdrie Savings Bank** has this week announced it will be receiving £10m worth of investment from a group of prominent Scottish businessmen, according to a BBC report. It is hoped that this injection of funds will allow the bank to lend to businesses in Scotland. The group of investors include Sir Tom Farmer, Sir David Murray and Brian Souter.

The bank, the last independent bank in Scotland, already holds seven branches in North Lanarkshire, and with this investment it is hoped two more branches will be opened within the next 18 months. With no shareholders and subsequently no dividends to pay out, the bank is now being referred to as the 'people's bank' within Scotland.

The bank's president, Bob Boyle said: "The trustees are delighted that so many prominent Scottish business figures have come forward to back our ambitions to expand. Several are supporting us through a combination of deposits and borrowings.

"Airdrie Savings bank, as you would expect, is approaching expansion with caution. We will dip our toe in the water by opening one branch at a time to prove the sustainability of growth before considering more ambitious plans."

Investor **Brian Souter**, who is also chief executive of the Stagecoach transport group said: "I think people are very tired and angry of what happened with our banks in Scotland and I think this creates an opportunity in the future to build a new bank which is based on mutual principles.

"It's not going to be speculating in all kinds of strange derivatives and it's not going to be a bank that's going to be focused overseas, it will be a bank that's focused in Scotland - and really it's a peoples' bank."

IFS warns June budget hitting UK's poorest

The Institute of Fiscal Studies have released their analysis on the Coalition Government's June Budget, claiming that the measures it sets out to achieve are "regressive". Research conducted by the think tank found that poorer households will be hit hardest from the cuts in tax and housing benefits and Disability Living Allowances that are scheduled to be put into action in 2014 and 2015.

The IFS also pointed out that while lower income families are most likely to suffer from the budget changes, upper-middle class households with no children have the most to gain from the proposed measures.

The report said: "Low-income households of working age lose the most as a proportion of income from the tax and benefit reforms announced in the emergency Budget. Those who lose the least are households of working age without children in the upper half of the income distribution. They do not lose out from cuts in welfare spending, and they are the biggest beneficiaries from the increase in the income tax personal allowance."

A summary of the report can be read here: http://www.ifs.org.uk/pr/progressive_budget.pdf