

Firms must help boost job numbers

Businesses are being urged to do something about a "lost generation" of people joining the lengthening unemployment queues.

"This is about helping to get people into jobs," said Edward Weir, finance director at Carousel Logistics in Kent during a round table meeting organised by South East Business and accountants Wilkins Kennedy. "The amount of people I am interviewing who are so far from being able to put up a credible performance to actually get into a job is terrifying."

Mr Weir referred to government proposals to pay an estimated £2,000 in wages a year to firms who take on someone who has been unemployed for a certain length of time within a specific age group.

"We have been looking very hard at some of the apprentice schemes and have enrolled in some of them." Mr Weir asked the banks how proactive they were in taking on people who are struggling to find jobs. "Do you have good apprentice

schemes in Kent and are they part of your operation in your offices?"

Banks were looking at the cost to income ratios and automation, said Graham Jordan from HSBC Bank. "The ability of staff to take on new employees is difficult. Most of the operations work is done centrally so the bank are looking for high performers – key people who are going to effect the business going forward."

Mark Burgess from RBS Natwest said the bank had a large service centre in Chatham with a local telephony service. "We are taking on young teenagers or those in their early twenties for six month contracts. That is a win win because we can have a look at some young people and if we like them, we take them on full time and if we don't, that is another conversation."

Most schools would relish the chance to have professionals offer the occasional hour to run workshops with pupils in which they could understand how firms work, said Patrick



Edward Weir (left) and Clifford Corne at the round table meeting organised by South East Business and Wilkins Kennedy

McGrath from Girlings Solicitors. But Andrew Metcalf from Maxim public relations and marketing warned it was difficult to go into schools because of criminal record bureau (CRB) checks.

Miranda Chapman from Pillory Barn Creative said she had walked into two local grammar schools without being CRB checked. "I go every single year to my daughter's and my son's grammar school where I give a presentation as a business person," Ms Chapman said. "Across two weeks of every summer holiday I have two people from the boys' school and two people from the girls' school and I am booked up already for next year." Ms Chapman added that she had a first year undergraduate from Leeds University doing a public relations degree. "She emailed me to ask if she could come for some work experience."

Mr Weir said Carousel was in the third year of taking a couple of boys from the Abbey

School in Faversham. "The Abbey School contacted us and said we are trying to get some real experience which people can put on their CVs. The thing that bothers me is the blockage in the communication between schools and businesses. I am hardly ever approached by a school."

Adam Merrett, a partner in Wilkins Kennedy, said all the firm's offices were approached by schools every year. People are taken on for work experience, and late last year staff went to a Dartford school for a "Dragons Den" style presentation helping to put business plans together. At the end of the day, plans from classes were examined to see who had the best ideas. "We weren't CRB checked either."

Clifford Corne, managing director of Secure Engineering, said pupils from the local grammar school had come into the firm during 2010, and two apprentices have started on an electronic security course which was not available in Kent. "I kept badgering various courses colleges to provide it, and ProLogis Academy at North West Kent College agreed, with our support, to put a pilot course on. Every year, I hope to add two apprentices to our workforce."

UK unemployment rose by 128,000 in the three months to October to 2.64 million, the highest level since 1994. The Office for National Statistics said the jobless rate was 8.3%, up from 7.9% in the previous quarter. Youth unemployment rose to 1.027 million, the highest since records began in 1992.

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