

West Lothian Business **CONNECTIONS**

THE MAGAZINE SERVING WEST LOTHIAN'S BUSINESS COMMUNITY • SPRING 2009

ALIVE AND KICKING

The thriving life-sciences sector makes further commitments to West Lothian

.....

CAN YOU GET THE STAFF?

West Lothian College engages with local employers to shape the workforce of the future

.....

A WARM WELCOME

Tourists as well as businesses can benefit from coming to West Lothian

LIQUID **GOLD**

West Lothian's whisky industry benefits from investment and jobs growth

.....
PLUS

The latest key economic indicators



win the SPACE RACE

Whatever you need space for, SiBCAS has a wide range of portable and modular accommodation solutions to suit your needs.

Whether you need a welfare block on your construction site or a gym that's fit for a top-flight football team, we can take care of everything.

Call SiBCAS today for details.
Easton Road, Bathgate, West Lothian, EH48 2SF
T: 01506 633122 **E:** info@sibcas.co.uk



flexible modular accommodation



HELLO



Cllr Martyn Day,
Executive Councillor
Development & Transport,
West Lothian Council



Duncan Walker,
President,
West Lothian Chamber
of Commerce

These are difficult times for business, and West Lothian has not been immune to the global impact which has seen the demise or contraction of a number of companies and resultant job losses. The Scottish Government's Small Business Bonus Scheme that aims to drastically reduce business rates will help companies cut outgoings. Over 1,300 businesses in West Lothian will benefit, including over 1,000 local firms that will not pay a penny in business rates. To further help local businesses respond to the present tough trading conditions a number of new initiatives have been put in place by Business Gateway West Lothian. Read about them on page 4.

At the end of April, West Lothian Economic Partnership is delighted to welcome back Professor Donald MacRae, Chief Economist at Lloyds TSB Scotland, who for a second year will provide a financial forecast at West Lothian's annual economic conference. He's joined by John Anderson, Chief Executive of The Entrepreneurial Exchange and Chris van der Kuyt, CEO of brightsolid Ltd (formerly Scotland OnLine), one of the country's internet pioneers. For a preview of Professor MacRae's views - and to find out more about the conference - turn to page 4.

Our cover story highlights a sector which for many years has maintained a wide diversity of employment, from head office to distribution. Find out how West Lothian's whisky industry is still maturing on page 7.

West Lothian makes a major contribution to the burgeoning Scottish life-sciences sector which, even in the current climate, represents a major opportunity for economic recovery and growth. Read about some of the latest developments in this exciting sector on pages 8 and 9.

With economic indicators pointing to a resurgence in domestic tourism, West Lothian is poised to reap the benefits. The imminent launch of Visit West Lothian, the area's new tourism company, is getting a warm welcome from local operators. Read about it on page 6.

A strong local workforce is essential for the success of local business. *Connections* interviewed the Principal of West Lothian College, Mhairi Laughlin to find out how the college is working hard to deliver training which meets the needs of local employers. Read about it on page 11.

And on page 10, find out what other parts of the education sector are doing to prepare students to be tomorrow's entrepreneurs, considering self employment as a viable option and giving them stake in their own future.

Business Connections magazine is unashamedly upbeat and positive about the local economy. West Lothian is a great place for business, located between Scotland's two major population centres with excellent skill levels in its workforce and a high quality of life.

To keep up to date with what's happening in West Lothian, why not sign up to receive our monthly e-mail magazine *Business Connections Online*, bringing you all West Lothian's business news, developments, events, economic facts and figures and new business support initiatives. Forward your copy to others if they have an interest in West Lothian and please keep sending us news of your own company successes.

Cllr Martyn Day, Executive Councillor Development & Transport,
West Lothian Council
Duncan Walker, President, West Lothian Chamber of Commerce

Please send your comments and contributions for **West Lothian Business Connections** to:

The Editor,
The Enterprise Centre, Almondvale Boulevard, Livingston,
West Lothian EH54 6QP
Tel 01506 777400
enterprise@westlothian.gov.uk
www.westlothian.com

For information about West Lothian Chamber of Commerce
Tel 01506 777937
info@wlchamber.com
www.wlchamber.com

Business Connections is published on behalf of the Community Planning & Regeneration service of West Lothian Council and West Lothian Chamber of Commerce by

reddishpink



INSIDE

- 4 BUSINESS SUPPORT**
In today's unsettled economic climate there's never been a better time to call on the Business Gateway
- 5 ECONOMY**
Professor Donald MacRae, chief economist with Lloyds TSB Scotland looks forward to this year's economic conference on 28 April
- 6 TOURISM**
Visit West Lothian is well placed to help local business take advantage of a changing market
- 7 INDUSTRY FOCUS**
The West Lothian whisky industry is still maturing
- 8-9 INDUSTRY FOCUS**
The life sciences sector in West Lothian continues to thrive
- 10 ENTERPRISE**
West Lothian's students are up for the challenge of business
- 11 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**
West Lothian College Principal Mhairi Laughlin talks about how they ensure that students gain the skills employers need
- 12 EMPLOYMENT**
Employment lawyer Asim Khan suggests some alternatives to redundancy
- 13 COMMUNITIES**
West Lothian's traditional towns are rising to the challenge of maintaining their unique qualities
- 14 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE**
Food for thought - business excellence with a social conscience
- 15 KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS**

THE TOUGH GET GOING

There's rarely been a better time to call upon the support of agencies such as Business Gateway and Scottish Enterprise, as companies steel themselves for an unsettled economic climate.

It could be said that negotiating your business through hard times is an almost forgotten skill. Indeed, thanks to over 15 years of relatively 'good times', many newer businesses have never had to face the challenges of a contracting economy and a fall in custom.

The good news for companies faced with tough decisions to ride out the recession is that national and local business development agencies can help with a wide portfolio of support in strategy, cost-cutting and boosting productivity.

High on the list of challenges is business finance. The West Lothian Loan Fund will consider applications from firms looking to resolve a funding gap. Administered by Business Gateway West Lothian, there are loans of up to £30,000 to support small and medium sized firms with business change projects.

Duncan Walker of West Lothian Chamber of Commerce said, "We applaud the launch of the West Lothian Loan Fund. This will be a source of competitive advantage for firms based in West Lothian or looking to locate here."

Nationally, Scottish Enterprise is taking steps through its Investor Ready Programme to help find alternative funding for companies sidelined from traditional sources.

For companies whose strategy centres around innovation or export markets, Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International have support services to ensure these opportunities are not missed.

And business efficiency support such as the Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service and Lean Management programme has recently been boosted



to help more companies reduce their costs, increase productivity and achieve real savings.

In West Lothian, Business Gateway has recognised the importance of solid support for its vibrant business sector by launching a range of key initiatives to help meet the challenges of the credit crunch full on.

A new monthly Key Economic Indicators report is available by email to business, monitoring the current conditions on a range of statistics which provide insight as to how the local economy is faring against national averages. These include local labour market trends, town centre shop occupancy rates, planning applications, letting of council owned business units, housing completions and house price changes.

For those looking for hands-on

support, a series of free and impartial workshops have been devised to equip your business with a 'personal action plan' to guide you through the downturn. Business Gateway manager Alice Sinnet is confident the workshops will provide valuable advice for employers:

"The aim is to help businesses review every aspect of their operations to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of a changing world," she said

Of key importance is a cash management workshop. A critical element of sustaining a business through an economic downturn is to maximise available cash. Almost without exception business failures are due to lack of cash. "It's essential that businesses understand the effect on cash of all the steps in their business processes. It's not, as often perceived, solely a credit control problem," Alice Sinnet added.

In the worst case, when companies have to face up to making staff redundant, redundancy response staff are on hand to ensure businesses can steer those affected in the right direction – helping them to get the information and advice they need to secure alternative employment as quickly as possible.

Now's the time to ask

A series of events is being held in Edinburgh to inspire and inform business leaders on a range of topics relating to help companies address the current economic challenges. They can be found on the website www.nowsthetimetask.com

Check your business health – West Lothian firms are entitled to a free review of their business model to ensure they are fit to face the current climate.

For more information and to arrange an appointment contact the Business Gateway team on telephone 01506 777400; e-mail bgateway@westlothian.gov.uk or text BIZ and your details to 60777.

TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Recent months have proved to be some of the most challenging ever for business.

West Lothian's annual Economic Conference on 28 April provides a platform and opportunity for local firms and policy makers to take stock of what is happening in the wider economy whilst gaining an insight into the local impact in West Lothian. The theme for this year's event is Turning Challenges into Opportunities.

We are delighted to welcome back Professor Donald MacRae, chief economist at Lloyds TSB Scotland to this year's conference, to provide the broad economic context.

Here, Professor MacRae gives a taster of his presentation on 28 April.

"Hindsight is more accurate but prediction is more interesting" is the warning quotation for any economist wishing to project, forecast, estimate or even guess the future track of the Scottish and West Lothian economies. It is many years since we experienced such a fast and furious decline in business and consumer confidence.

Our latest annual underlying growth rate was 1.4% but with an ominous fall of 0.8% in quarter 3 of last year, Scotland is now firmly in recession. The

latest Fraser of Allander Institute forecast for the Scottish economy for 2009 is a decline of 2.6%. Their worse scenario projection is a decline of 3.1%. Consumer

optimism has fallen to

Donald MacRae

the lowest level in twenty years. Scottish house prices have not declined anything like the same degree as other parts of the UK but the number of housing transactions (purchases and sales) has at least halved compared to last year.

Just under half (47%) of the businesses reporting in the latest Lloyds TSB Scotland Business Monitor were expecting a decline in turnover in the next six months compared to only 19% expecting an increase. Scottish retail sales in February 2009 increased annually by 2.7% indicating that the Scottish consumer may not entirely have lost all confidence but is certainly subdued compared to last year.

Not only are the days of cheap credit over but the Scottish economy

faces a distinct squeeze on government spending in the next few years. After years of vigorous expansion, financial services face consolidation and concentration.

West Lothian is clearly not immune from the effects of the credit crunch. In the nine months from April last year to January this year claimant unemployment has increased by 66% (Scotland 48%). Expect these figures to worsen over the next six months.

In the pain of recession, who will emerge as winners? Come along to the West Lothian Economic Conference on April 28th and find out.

Professor Donald MacRae, Chief Economist, Lloyds TSB Scotland

Don't miss!

West Lothian's annual Economic Conference takes place on 28 April at the newly opened Howden Park Centre in Livingston.

Following Professor Donald MacRae's economic forecast, is John Anderson, chief executive of The Entrepreneurial Exchange.

A well-known specialist in entrepreneurship and new venture creation in Scotland, John has considerable experience of emerging and high growth companies. As well as being the chief executive of The Entrepreneurial Exchange, John Anderson is an experienced non-executive chairman and director in growing businesses. He is also an honorary senior lecturer at the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship at the University of Strathclyde, a founding GlobalScot member and sits on the board of the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust.

Our third speaker, Chris van der Kuyl is a highly experienced chief executive and non-executive director whose expertise combines the start-up, development and market listed business arena in the technology, media and entertainment sectors. Chris is currently chief executive officer of brightsolid Limited (formerly Scotland OnLine), one of the country's internet pioneers.



ABOVE: Chris van der Kuyl (left) and John Anderson

Conference organiser, West Lothian Economic Partnership, focuses its work around its current three-year local economic strategy for 2007-2010. The conference also provides the opportunity for the Partnership to launch their Economic Review for 2009, which will update you on the range of partner actions taken over the last twelve months around the three key themes of Business and Enterprise; Learning, Skills and Employability; and Communities, Connections and Location.

West Lothian is an important contributor to Scotland's economy with a strong presence in key economic sectors, making it the place to be for businesses with a growth and innovation agenda. Find out more about West Lothian's place in the Scottish economy and use this unique opportunity to make some excellent contacts and ask all your questions.

To book call 01506 777937 or email brenda.cumming@wlvchamber.com

Defining tourism has always been a difficult task. Does a heritage visit to Linlithgow Palace mean as much a day's shopping at the stores of Livingston? If asked, Visit West Lothian's executive officer, Anna Lightbody, is clear. "If the trip brings or retains people and spend for West Lothian, then the answer is an emphatic yes".

With a three-way remit to partner the efforts of the industry as a whole, Visit West Lothian (VWL) has its agenda

clearly set out. As well as a qualitative change in West Lothian's perception, efforts are required to raise visitor numbers, and promote economic development in a sector that already enjoys over a million recognised visits annually, and which in Jan - Sept 2008 generated revenue of some £140 million.

It's certainly timely. West Lothian is playing a leading role in VisitScotland's Homecoming 2009 initiative – including a showpiece pageant in Linlithgow at the end of May. The eagerly anticipated

launch in the same month – along with the website (www.visitwestlothian.co.uk) – has brought a warm welcome from the industry's local association, the West Lothian Tourism Forum (WLTF), which was instrumental in the formation, and remains an integral part of VWL. "We've worked long and hard to establish this partnership with the council", says Robin Chesters, who both chairs WLTF and sits on the board of the new body. He's reticent to call it a destination marketing organisation, because he feels it's much more of a trailblazer than that. "We aim to do so much more together, and see this as a partnership of equals, strings to the same bow, between the council and the industry.

"How we work together on a day to day basis is something that is still evolving, and will continue to do so. The industry and the market are always changing, and – because we have a dynamic business sector, and a willing local authority – we can respond in new circumstances as new opportunities arise."

Adding the support of the regional body lends additional weight to the efforts of the WLTF. With many other local authorities directly championing their indigenous tourism industry, Visit West Lothian raises the profile for the industry – which is among the region's biggest and most consistent revenue generators.

While supporting an impressive 3,000 jobs, the industry is widely represented by small, independent operations – particularly in the accommodation sector. Anna Lightbody says VWL is able to promote the region as a whole, helping West Lothian to tap into currently under exposed markets. "Longer stay visitors, and wider business tourism and conferences can be delivered more effectively through partnership working."

Realising those aims would bring collateral benefits far beyond the recognised tourism industry, which will certainly give business reason enough to Visit West Lothian for more than a homecoming day trip.

TOURISM TAKES OFF

With every indicator pointing to a resurgence in domestic tourism, Visit West Lothian is a timely incorporation, well placed to help local business take advantage of a changing market.



CONTACT
 Call: Anna Lightbody, Tourism Executive, Visit West Lothian on 01506 777947
 Email: info@visitwestlothian.co.uk
www.visitwestlothian.co.uk

BRAND NEW GROWTH

When considering the Water of Life, muse over flavours that are as much Avon Glen and Almond Valley as they are highland rivers and remote western isles. The West Lothian whisky industry is still maturing.

The smart residences of St Magdalene in Linlithgow owe their architectural uniqueness to the decades-gone distillery of that name, the last in this part of Scotland. Nevertheless, West Lothian has always maintained a wide diversity of other employment in the industry – from head offices to distribution. Now comes news that the area is about to revive the centuries-old traditional skills, in a very modern incarnation.

To the British drinker, *Glen Turner* single malt and the blended *Label 5* may not be familiar brands. However, from their bottling plant near Bathgate, where French parent company La Martiniquaise invested £15 million in 2004, these 'Made in Scotland' products are worldwide successes.

In recognition of that accomplishment, the company has outlined plans to build new grain and malt distilleries, fully covering the company's distillation needs, and removing the need to buy in new spirit. It's a pending rebirth of time-honoured ways in an up to date setting.

"The integration of the distillery is a very welcome step in creating a fully integrated Scotch whisky production facility," says general manager Ian Palmer. "This now guarantees our supply of Scotch whisky for many years, allowing our brands to grow."

Staff numbers will increase from the current total of 37 - to 55 by summer 2009 - and to 67 after future phases are complete.

Over in Livingston, the domestically

"The whisky industry in West Lothian employs over 500 people, almost 6% of the nationwide workforce in this sector"

well known premium whisky distiller Glenmorangie has acquired a new site at the Alba Campus. It's intended for a new bottling plant and offices – part of a £45 million investment programme in response to growing demand. This sees the company developing its single malt brands, Glenmorangie and Ardbeg, while withdrawing from the bottling and sale of blended Scotch whisky. Subject to securing planning consent, a significant number of employees at the company's current base in Broxburn are expected to move to the new site when it is completed in summer 2010.

The company's existing 33-acre site in Broxburn is the subject of a purchase bid from multinational drinks giant Diageo – who will retain it, mainly for use as cask warehousing. Broxburn's whisky triangle is also home to Ian Macleod Distillers' headquarters. Over in Addiewell, the North British Distillery company has a large maturation and warehousing site.

The whisky industry in West Lothian employs over 500 people, which, from Scotch Whisky Society figures, is almost six percent of the nationwide workforce in this sector.



LIFE SCIENCES IN GOOD HEALTH

You could be forgiven for assuming you need a lab coat and clipboard to enter Livingston's Alba Campus. There's certainly more than average cerebral activity in the neighbourhood, and the recent announcement from Quintiles will do nothing to dissipate that reputation.

The multi-national biotechnology company, which already has nearly 400 staff across two West Lothian locations, is investing £7.25m in a new laboratory and office facility, which could create an extra 150 staff over the coming four years. The new 112,000 sq ft project – three times the size of their existing laboratory – is being aided by a £1.25m regional selective assistance grant. With a further 20,000 sq ft set aside for future use, Graham Murray, general manager, Quintiles Laboratories Europe, thanked West Lothian Council, the Scottish Government, and Scottish Enterprise for their support in the project. "Their assistance, particularly the Regional Selective Assistance grant, was instrumental in our decision to expand in Livingston."

There's proactive investment too, in infrastructure to support and attract new life sciences activity. Scottish Enterprise has responded to the exacting requirements of the sector, by building cleanroom facilities on Livingston's Starlaw Park. The Innotek Centre, managed by Sematek UK, provides essential facilities that would normally represent an expensive investment for start up and intermediate companies. Add that to the proximity of the fertile intellectual grounds of nearby universities – particularly the Heriot Watt campus – and West Lothian is uniquely placed to cultivate a healthy research and development environment.

In tangible proof of that virtuous state

West Lothian's cutting edge family of innovators in biosciences continue to evolve with Darwinian determination. The latest developments in the sector reveal razor sharpness as keen as ever.

of affairs, plaudits were handed out recently for home-spun Touch Bionics in Livingston. The company has been the subject of global acclaim for developing the world's first commercially available bionic hand, a true breakthrough advance in the field of active prosthetics. Recently, the "i-LIMB Hand" was recognised by *TIME Magazine* as one of the Top 50 inventions of 2008. Even in a year that saw the Large Hadron Collider and ever faster supercomputers unveiled, the i-Limb Hand proved a world beater.

"We are delighted to have been identified by *TIME* as one of the inventions of the year, a real honour for any innovative company," said Touch Bionics CEO Stuart Mead. "To have been placed ahead of incredible stories like the Mars Rover, MIT's MDS robot (Mobile Dexterous Social) and Berkeley's invisibility cloak is a tremendous achievement."

The 20 years of R&D behind the i-LIMB Hand is now benefiting more than 400 patients worldwide. Despite its highly technical name, it looks and acts like a real human hand, and represents a generational advance in bionics and patient care.

Historically, Scotland has always played a strong hand in ground breaking medical fields. Any observant visitor to Bathgate will know it's the birthplace of James Young Simpson – but there's nothing soporific about the more modern medical legacy of West Lothian. The roll call of companies – including pharmaceuticals developer Aptuit;

far-seeing contact lens innovator Bausch & Lomb; and specialist medical manufacturer Ethicon – reads like a cutting edge life-sciences Who's Who. Another leading company, Encap, specialists in drug delivery technology, won a West Lothian Chamber of Commerce Innovation Award at the end of 2008 – proving that you have to be a world leader to impress the neighbours in this field.

The West Lothian community makes a major contribution to the burgeoning Scottish life-sciences sector which, even in the current climate, represents a major opportunity for economic recovery and growth. As recently as May 2007, the Scottish Enterprise Young Company Finance Report measured the sector growth rate at 7-8 per cent – four times the medium term, average growth rate of the Scottish economy.

The companies operating in West Lothian represent a broad spectrum, from multinationals to small independent research firms. Most recently one of those locally founded firms, bioanalysis concern Tepnel Scientific Services Ltd, has been successfully courted by San Diego based diagnostic testing specialist Gen Probe, in a deal worth \$132.1 million (around £89.9 million).

In the highly-skilled research and specialist manufacturing fields, the industry has grown, over a matter of just three decades, from virtually nothing, to over 30 companies employing in excess of 3,000 people – ten percent of the entire Scottish total,

and continuing to flourish.

Even that figure could be conservative, when some larger, but not necessarily sector-obvious companies are taken into account. For example, they may be better known for their weather-defeating outdoor wear, but WL Gore is also a major medical products concern, distributing vascular grafts, sutures, soft tissue and cardiovascular patches from their Livingston base. Familiar too on supermarket shelves, Johnson & Johnson Medical Ltd is also hard at work producing sterile medical equipment - and Unichem's pharmaceutical distribution facility is also a significant local employer, adding

“The companies operating in West Lothian represent a broad spectrum, from multinationals to small independent research firms.”

Whitburn. However, ask anyone taking in the view of Linlithgow Loch how many microbiologists there are in the Royal Burgh, and they may overlook the 13 among the staff of Express Microbiology, the six year old company that offers a complete testing service, allergen screening, and hygiene consultancy.

“For us, West Lothian was an excellent location, and Linlithgow made best sense for our company”, says Dr Jennifer Newton, the company principal, who moved the operation from Fife.

While Express Microbiology may find a change as good as a rest, it's clear that, for life sciences, West Lothian is just what the doctor ordered.

further downstream logistics to the rarefied waters of R&D more readily recognised as the hub of the sector.

Although concentrated in Livingston, the industry is not confined there. There's representation throughout West Lothian. Examples range from analysis equipment suppliers Capital HPLC in Broxburn; to water treatment specialists Hager & Elsasser in



Not many of today's entrepreneurs will have had the sort of business support currently available to school and college students. Then again, few of today's businesses will have first come to the marketplace in such a competitive environment. That's why the 90 pupils of S2 at Bathgate Academy took part in February's Business Plan Challenge, designed to get enterprise on their personal curriculum at an early age. It's part of a raft of actions in the council's response to *Determined to Succeed*, the Scottish Government's strategy for enterprise in education.

"What we're trying to do is to get them to use their skills in different ways," says Alice Sinnet, who manages the Business Gateway service in West Lothian. She's been working closely with education services for some time, and the Business Plan Challenge is just the latest way Business Gateway is reaching out to the potential entrepreneurs of tomorrow. "This is not just about setting up in business; it's about exploring different options, and thinking in new ways. We try to get students thinking about their market; who their clients are; location; and what their prices might be."

Also up for the challenge are the further education students of West Lothian College, where there's a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The College students already run a number of viable commercial activities – from a hairdressing salon to a campus restaurant. At a recent event organised and sponsored by Business Gateway, students pitched

PROMOTING AN ENTERPRISING CULTURE

Pay attention at the back of the class. In the future, to get ahead, it will take more than a string of "A's". The students of today will have to be versed in the subject of business too.

their business plans in a competition to win £1,000 towards turning their dreams into reality. High flyer Alan Fisher impressed the judges with his idea to launch *KiteOgraphy*, an aerial photography service for both private and commercial customers.

Alan, from Armadale, plans to attach a camera to a kite, to allow him to take the pictures. It's a popular hobby, but Alan told the panel that he was the first person in Scotland to use the idea as a basis for business.

The initiative flies right to the top of the education tree. At Heriot Watt University, students on management degree courses receive input from Business Gateway. Geoffrey Arnold, lecturer in the School of Management and Languages, believes it's hard to judge if there is any empirical evidence, but says it does undoubtedly benefit students to be more aware of the big wide world of business. "Supporting an enterprising frame of mind from the outset pays benefits in developing employability skills – especially teambuilding, adaptability and problem solving."

To pass on those benefits to the community is the goal for Alice Sinnet. "If we can



ABOVE: Cllr Martyn Day at the launch of the recent Business Plan Challenge.



ABOVE: Business Plan Challenge winner Alan Fisher receives his prize from provost Tom Kerr

get some creative thinking about what's missing from communities, and how these potential business people of the future could provide those things - that puts something back. It gives

them a stake in their own future – and a potentially profitable one for them as well."

It gives a whole new meaning to business incubators.

CONTACT
 To contact Business Gateway West Lothian call 01506 777400 or email bgateway@westlothian.gov.uk

THE RIGHT PEOPLE FOR THE RIGHT JOBS

West Lothian's economy is increasingly dependent upon a wide pool of skills sets, leading West Lothian College to position itself as the ideal platform for future workforce development in a whole range of sectors.

It's often said that it's the employer and not the employee who is most apprehensive on day one of a new job.

High-quality staff are important to any business, and employers need to feel confident that their successful candidate can hit the ground running with an increasingly complex set of skills. As for the 'newbie' concerned, they want to know that the training and education they have undergone has prepared them sufficiently for the world of work.

So it's no surprise that in West Lothian, where the economy has diversified beyond all recognition in 50 years, its further education college is keen to ensure that the right mix of well-trained and committed students is available to the area's rich business base.

In early Summer 2008, Mhairi Laughlin, principal of West Lothian College, set about formalising their work in the business community through an Employer Engagement Strategy. The aim is straightforward, says Mhairi: "It's about making sure that we engage with local employers to ensure that our students come out with the right skills set at the end of their programme.

"To help us move forward with that, we appointed an



Employer Engagement Officer who has now been in post for around 8 months."

A key feature of this year involved every member of College staff visiting a local business for a day in February, to generate a good understanding of what they are looking for in their workforces. "This triggered a huge wealth of qualitative feedback for us," says Mhairi. "Normally when we try and gather information from businesses via an online survey for example, the response rate is relatively small."

Some subject areas have well-established links with the sector concerned. Health and care is a prime example thanks to work experience forming a compulsory part of the students' training. But the time is now ripe to expand these links in other disciplines.

"We are ramping up this sort of engagement by standardising our approach

across the College," explains Mhairi. "Over the past year, our employer engagement staff have been working with the construction, motor vehicle and engineering sections in particular to extend their links. This has gone really well, to the extent that we have a significantly increased number of apprentices across a range of trades."

Electrical engineering is another area to have benefited from investment, led by an increased understanding of the labour market. "As a College, we can't offer programmes in every single construction trade, but we want at least to focus on those skills areas that have long-term prospects," says Mhairi. "So electrical engineering

skills could feasibly still keep people employable even during the downturn in, say, the new-build sector."

The creative industries, too, are gaining prominence in a way typically only seen in Glasgow and Edinburgh. West Lothian College is keen to be seen as a feeder for the sector, and the popularity of its Creative Industries Employer Day in March demonstrated the level of activity among West Lothian-based companies.

So how does Mhairi assess the strategy so far? "We're analysing the feedback from February's staff visits, and we already know that this is a great springboard for how we intend to move forward. This initiative is not intended to be a one-hit wonder – we want to increase engagement with the business community in the long term."

And with new programme offerings like the BA Business Management degree, PR & Advertising, and Life Sciences on the menu, the multi-talented workforce of tomorrow in West Lothian will be well-equipped for a renaissance in the economy.

"It's about making sure that we engage with local employers to ensure that our students come out with the right skills"



CONTACT

To find out how West Lothian College can serve your business needs, email business@west-lothian.ac.uk or call 01506 427955

ALTERNATIVES TO REDUNDANCY

As we look outside we can see the 'green shoots of spring', however, business owners are still searching for the 'green shoots of recovery' in the economy. Indeed a recent news story in the Scotsman observed that 10,500 Scottish firms may go out of business by the end of 2010. With UK unemployment now hitting 2 million and West Lothian's unemployment rate in February 2009 higher than at any time since March 1997, Connections asked local employment law specialist Asim Khan, Legal Services Director of Ramsay Employment Law, if there are other options that companies could consider before making staff redundant.

Laying off staff is hopefully the last resort for any company. Companies could consider some of the following alternatives to redundancy:

Reduced benefits

Employees may agree to a reduction in insured benefits (such as healthcare) and even employer pension contributions in return for ongoing employment.

Flexible working

This could involve a job share with another employee that would otherwise be at risk of redundancy, or an agreement that a team will all reduce their working hours to cover a drop off in business.

Unpaid time off

Some employees may be prepared to take unpaid time away from work in return for a promise that they will be able to return to work at a later date. Employers should obviously be careful to not make promises that they cannot deliver, but it is possible that some employees would welcome the opportunity of time away from work, perhaps to go travelling.

Lay off and short time

Check the contracts of employment that your employees have signed. You might find that they contain a provision allowing you to lay employees off work, and impose short working time on them. Please note that you will only be able to exercise this option if you have the contractual right to do so.



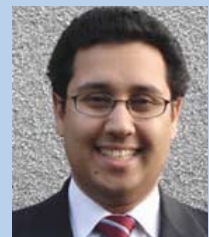
Early retirement

Are any employees willing to accept early retirement? If so, will that increase the employer's costs, or be a benefit overall?

Finally, a word of caution - it will not normally be possible to impose many of these suggestions on an otherwise unwilling employee. You should always take advice prior to seeking to implement any of the above.

CONTACT
Contact Ramsay Employment Law
on 08456 445485
akhan@ramsayconsulting.co.uk
www.ramsayemploymentlaw.co.uk

ASIM KHAN
is Legal
Services
Director
of Ramsay
Employment
Law based



in West Lothian. Asim has been practising as a solicitor specialising in employment law for over ten years. His work includes advising companies varying in size from 5 employees up to 1,000 employees.

BELOW: Artist's impression of the new partnership centre planned for Bathgate.



ABOVE: Cllr Martyn Day (left) with George McNeill, Chair of the Linlithgow Burgh Halls Working Group.

SUPPORTING TRADITIONAL TOWN CENTRES

Strong community identity has always been a hallmark of West Lothian. Many of the area's traditional towns are rising to the challenge of maintaining their unique and independent qualities.

To most visitors, the concept of West Lothian revolves around the spectacular and continued success of *The Centre*, Livingston's recast, rebuilt and rebranded retail experience. Across West Lothian though, there's just as much activity in a number of ambitious and independent communities, matched by a number of council-backed initiatives.

The high-profile high street regeneration of Bathgate has been largely welcomed by the active local business community – embodied by the Bathgate Traders Forum. The key element has been an initiative called *BIDs* – the Business Improvement District scheme. In a poll last Spring, 190 out of 205 businesses supported the BIDs concept. Remarkable, especially as it committed businesses to a levy, to part fund any future works. However, an initial project – a shop front improvement scheme – proved so popular that local retailers readily spent something like six times their grant funding of £44,500.

The success of the Bathgate shop front scheme has led to the initiative being rolled out in Broxburn, Uphall and Armadale. As a virtuous spin-off, interest

has risen in membership of all the existing traders' groups – in Bathgate, Armadale, and Linlithgow – and even helped prompt the formation of similar voluntary bodies in Broxburn/Uphall and Whitburn.

Linlithgow's community credentials have been endorsed, with a Bronze "Liveable Communities Award 2008", at an international competition held in China. Linlithgow's very active and varied civic bodies have now joined residents, businesses, community and council representatives to form *Linlithgow Aspires*, which aims to allow everyone to contribute to developing a twenty-year sustainable vision for the town.

One principle adopted has been the Cittaslow – "slow city" – concept. The Italian inspired Cittaslow is an international network of over 100 towns that are dedicated to improving their quality of life. To achieve Cittaslow status, Linlithgow was assessed in a process covering the environment, infrastructure, quality of urban fabric, and encouragement of local produce and products, hospitality and community.

Tangibly, there are also a number of

projects underway that will help reinforce community identity around West Lothian. In Bathgate, there are plans to demolish the former council and education service HQ, Lindsay House, and to redevelop the town centre site as a partnership centre. Over in Fauldhouse, work has already commenced on a £7.2 million scheme to create a new community campus and health centre. The Fauldhouse Community Development Trust is also developing a series of four, annual, themed events, including this April's music festival.

Linlithgow's 17th century Burgh Halls are undergoing a £5m revamp, to become a multi-purpose centre featuring everything from heritage interpretation, to arts education programmes. The project's scheduled for completion by March 2010. The nearby historic Sheriff Court has gone on sale, with a detailed planning brief in place to protect the B-listed building.

When it comes to protecting their identities, communities in West Lothian appear as dynamic, and individual, as ever.

CONTACT
 For more information about West Lothian Council's support for traditional town centres contact
 Suzanne McCardle, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) Manager on 01506 776386
 or Hazel Hay, Tourism & Town Centres Officer on 01506 777917.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Can the pursuit of business excellence come with a social conscience? For one West Lothian fruit and vegetable supplier this concept is alive and kicking as it leads the way with a hugely successful model for social enterprises.

The business sector is no stranger to concepts like corporate social responsibility and business in the community. But whilst firms may be able to capitalise on activity linked to charitable work or social sponsorship, they may struggle to lay claim to the title of 'social enterprise'.

This term is reserved for businesses whose core activity is of tangible benefit to the community as well as the economy. And if the success story of Livingston-based WELFEHD (West Lothian Food & Health Department) is anything to go by, it's a prime example of the positive impact of social enterprises.

Formed as a company limited by guarantee in 2006, WELFEHD became a purchase and supply hub for food co-ops across West Lothian. Its mission is simple: 'to reduce the barriers associated with eating a healthy diet by making fresh fruit and vegetables more widely available and affordable'.

Angela Moohan, development manager at WELFEHD, outlines the concept: "We buy fruit and veg from local producers and suppliers, and sell on to around 16 food co-ops operating across West Lothian. What they don't sell, they don't pay for, and we pick up again."

Co-op sites range from schools to churches, lunch clubs and community centres – many of which are located in low-income areas. And a knock-on effect of WELFEHD's operation is that it has

become a loyal employer to a number of staff previously long-term unemployed.

The social enterprise model is not new. What makes WELFEHD an impressive example of business acumen combined with community-mindedness are the figures. "To end January 2009," explains Angela, "83% of our income was sales-based, and 17% came in the form of grants."

Typically, the social enterprise sector has been represented by poorly-performing businesses that could not survive without public sector finance to keep them afloat. But now social enterprises are expected to demonstrate a robust business plan that shows a fast track to self-sufficiency. WELFEHD's own targets forecast a 100% reliance on sales alone by 2012.

Currently, social enterprises contribute £8.4bn to the UK economy equalling almost 1% of yearly GDP. Though relatively small, the brands that make up this sector include high-profile businesses such as Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurant, The Big Issue and The Eden Project.

It certainly helps to have backing from the people at the top. Gordon Brown recently described social enterprises as the "new British success story", and the Scottish Government has made a £30m Scottish Investment



ABOVE: The Knightsridge Early Years Centre food co-op supplied by WELFEHD

Fund available to help develop profitable social enterprises that can demonstrate a solid business case for expansion.

Back at WELFEHD, Angela admits to facing difficulties in defining their identity: "We're not a voluntary organisation, but not a traditional business. We're a hybrid. So it's always a challenge to strike a balance between the profit motive and our main objectives – to promote health and wellbeing."

Either way, the future is bright enough to have encouraged WELFEHD to purchase large premises in Livingston's Kirkton Campus. From July, it will let the space it doesn't need to other social enterprises that could work collaboratively with them and achieve economies of scale through its own take on the business incubator model.

More than just food for thought, then, it is clear that enterprise with a cause can inspire businesses to achieve great things.

Find out more about WELFEHD at www.welfehd.co.uk

Support for social enterprise

WELFEHD have been supported in their development over the last 18 months by Business Gateway West Lothian. For information on the business support available to Social Enterprises in West Lothian through Business Gateway, contact Martin Thomson, Business Growth Adviser at Business Gateway West Lothian on 01506 777961 or e-mail martin.thomson@westlothian.gov.uk

KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	2001	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 (proj)	2024 (proj)	2031 (proj)	Source:
Population										
Population	159,000	163,800	165,700	167,800			173,000	196,400	202,100	GRO(S)
% of population aged 0 to 29	38.81%	37.42%	37.36%	37.55%			36.99%	34.27%	35.63%	GRO(S)
% of population aged 30 to 49	32.33%	32.17%	31.93%	31.44%			30.59%	26.68%	26.13%	GRO(S)
% of population aged 50+	28.99%	30.46%	30.78%	31.01%			32.42%	39.05%	38.20%	GRO(S)
Labour market										
Resident Workforce (working age)	104,000	107,200	105,900	106,858						UK National Statistics
Total number of jobs	67,600	73,600	75,200	74,700						Annual Business Inquiry
% of jobs in service sector	68.30%	75.27%	75.80%	75.20%						UK National Statistics
Economic activity rate	88.50%	88.50%	84.10%	87.20%	86.20%					Annual Population Survey/ Labour Force Survey
- males (working age) (1)										Annual Population Survey/ Labour Force Survey
Economic activity rate (1)	79.40%	78.80%	80.40%	78.50%	79.50%					Annual Population Survey/ Labour Force Survey
- females (working age)										UK National Statistics
Claimant unemployment (2)	3,090	2,505	2,505	2,686	2,319	3,735				UK National Statistics
Claimant unemployment rate	3.00%	2.30%	2.40%	2.50%	2.20%	3.50%				UK National Statistics
Long term as % of all unemployment (3)	10.20%	9.00%	8.20%	8.80%	9.50%	5.90%				UK National Statistics
Education										
% population degree educated (working age)	23.40%	28.50%	26.40%	29.40%						Annual Population Survey/ Labour Force Survey
% population with no qualifications (working age)	16.00%	13.00%	12.00%	12.30%						Annual Population Survey/ Labour Force Survey
Output and Business Activity										
Average gross weekly earnings (4)	£356	£389	£388	£405	£421					Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
Gross Domestic Product (£ million) (5)	£1,658	£1,743	£1,780	£1,876						Mackay Consultants
Number of businesses	4,410	4,485	4,500	4,450	4,405					West Lothian Council
VAT-registered businesses	2,965	3,225	3,390	3,360						BERR
New business start-ups (6)		629	709	700	490					Committee of Scottish Clearing Banks
Travel										
Inward commuting	22,491									Census 2001
- as % of workforce	31%									Census 2002
Outward commuting	26,109									Census 2003
- as % of workforce	35%									Census 2004
Edinburgh Airport passenger arrivals and departures (millions)	6.04	8.45	8.61	9.04			11.5			Scottish Transport Statistics
Housing										
Households	65,062	69,309	70,236	71,351			74,870	91,310	94,950	GRO(S)
Owner-occupation (% of household)	62%	68%	66%	66%						Census 2001/SHS
Housing completions	1,366	875	989	768	449		1,175	714		West Lothian Council
Average house price (7)	£69,055	£114,390	£130,921	£173,329	£174,310					Scottish Government/ESPC

(1) Change in methodology between the two surveys between 2004 - 2005. Four-quarter average data for Apr - June.
 (2) Claimant unemployment and claimant unemployment rates as at January each year.
 (3) Long-term unemployed are those who have been unemployed continuously for 12 months or more (rates as at January each year for period 2007 to 2009 and July for 2001 to 2006).
 (4) Workplace earnings.
 (5) Estimates (constant 2006 values).
 (6) New businesses based in West Lothian that have opened accounts with any of the four Scottish Clearing Banks.
 (7) From 2007, house price information sourced from Edinburgh Solicitors Property Centre (ESPC).

West Lothian Council produces a regular Key Economic Indicator update to help you understand the local economy. It reports on a range of indicators including local labour market trends, town centre occupancy and house price changes. If you would like to receive this update by email, please call 01506 777400 or email: enterprise@westlothian.gov.uk

600 BUSINESSES HAVE BENEFITED FROM STAFF TRAINING WITH THE BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP CENTRE

Investing in a well trained, skilled team will bring growth and prosperity to a business especially in a challenging economic climate.

To find out how your business can achieve

- improved efficiency
- raised staff motivation
- business development
- increased profits
- enhanced customer satisfaction



Call

01506 427955

email

business@west-lothian.ac.uk

or visit

www.west-lothian.ac.uk

Business Partnership Centre