

NEWS RELEASE

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Scottish Government considers plans to extend Modern Apprenticeships

Hundreds of new apprenticeship places could be created in the food and drink industry under proposals being considered by the Scottish Government.

Improve, the food and drink sector skills council, has submitted plans for Scotland's first Level Two Modern Apprenticeship scheme to government officials. The move comes in response to the Scottish Government's promise last September to extend the scope of Modern Apprenticeships.

Unlike the rest of the UK, Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland have only ever been available at Level Three. The lack of apprenticeships available at Level Two has been blamed for Scotland's poor record on apprentice numbers in the food and drink manufacturing industry.

"Modern Apprenticeships have simply been beyond what a majority of workers in food and drink manufacturing are capable of achieving," said Kelvin Thomson, operations manager for Improve in Scotland. "Of course, we would like to see the workforce up-skill and move on to a higher level, but you need a suitable stepping stone in place to allow that to happen. That has been sadly lacking in Scotland.

"Employers have been calling for a Level Two Modern Apprenticeship for a number of years now. They know it would have a big impact in attracting more young people into the industry and would help address the current situation where nearly one in five workers lack any kind of formal qualification. There are ambitious plans to increase the sector's turnover from £7.6 billion to £10 billion per year by 2017, but to do that we need to raise the base level of skills in the workforce. When the government said last year it was ready to listen to suggestions for Level Two Modern Apprenticeships, we were determined to get in there quickly with water-tight proposals so we could get the ball rolling."

Mr Thomson continued: “We have done our homework on this. We have shown our proposals to all the major training providers currently running Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland and they have fed back to us that they would be able to recruit 600 apprentices on to the programme immediately. That’s about ten times as many people as we have on the Modern Apprenticeships at the moment.

“We’ve already seen the SkillXtra pilot scheme enjoy success and the Level Two Modern Apprenticeship would run on from that with funding along the same lines. Money-wise, we’re being realistic – we believe this could all be funded within the government’s existing budget for training. But we’re also saying that there would have to be funding for all age groups; if the government maintained its position of prioritising the 16-19 age group, this would not have the desired impact on apprentice numbers.”

The proposals put forward by Improve follow the same format as the revised Level Three framework for the Modern Apprenticeship in Food and Drink Manufacture successfully introduced in December. The modular system allows apprentices to pick designated pathways from a choice of 500 learning units, allowing them the flexibility to specialise in any of the full range of food and drink manufacturing operations. The Level Two proposals include additional options in areas such as hazard analysis, coaching, management and languages in order to encourage apprentices to broaden their employability skills. Each successful apprentice qualifies with a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) at Level Two. Ends

Note to editors

Improve is one of 25 sector skills councils established by the government to take the lead in driving up skills in the workplace in order to promote higher productivity and stronger competitiveness for UK businesses in the global market. Funded primarily by the government, sector skills councils are also supported by employers in their sectors, whose needs they represent when stimulating change among the providers of education and skills. Sector skills councils work closely with employers to promote greater commitment to improving skills in their workforces, and with schools, colleges, universities, and private training organisations to improve the provision of basic skills training and to make vocational and occupational training more relevant to the modern commercial climate.

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