

theBUSINESS
ENTERPRISE

Putting a price on reputation

20 YEARS OF INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

More than 200 county firms, charities and schools have signed up to a scheme which measures how good they are to work for.

The national Investors in People (IiP) standard marks its 20th anniversary this year.

Launched in 1991 by then employment secretary Michael Howard, it aimed to give businesses a framework for improving their performance.

To make the grade businesses are offered a regional level of advice, support and assessment tailored to their needs.

Assessment includes interviews with management and staff. Those that excel can now gain bronze, silver or gold recognition. About 210 county organisations have the standard.

by **TOM PEGDEN**
DEPUTY BUSINESS EDITOR

But it's not free, and nor is it necessarily right for everyone. Assessments cost up to £750 a day – plus VAT and expenses – and can take days, while companies that don't fit into a traditional framework, for instance those within the arts, might not benefit.

Suki Deol is human resources manager at property developer Westleigh Developments, which has 200 staff in the East Midlands, including 50 at its Whetstone head office.

It has just won gold status, putting it among the top one per cent of recognised organisations in the UK. There are just 19 in the East Midlands and nine in Leicestershire.

She said: "When we heard about the new approach and

additional awards we took the decision to apply for the gold status, confident of achieving the very best.

"Preparing for the three-day assessment was hard work as we had to gather evidence for each of the 165 indicators we were required to meet.

"However a large part of it involved the assessor interviewing employees."

Ms Deol said the downturn had forced the firm to make redundancies, "but because of our open-door policy, if people had issues they could raise them".

Westleigh managing director Chris Beighton said: "We hope this new status will allow us to continue to build relationships with our clients and suppliers, but also encourage new companies to work with us."

Aurum Holdings, the Braun-



GOING THAT EXTRA MILE: Westleigh Developments HR manager Suki Deol, left, and administrative director Judy Beighton with the Investors in People gold status plaque

stone Frith company behind jewellery chain Goldsmiths, received silver recognition last April.

Commercial director Richard Gerrard said: "The team is our most important asset and therefore IiP reflects our commitment to maintaining a great working environment, living by our values and encouraging our teams to learn and grow with us."

Max Boden is policy manager at Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce, which uses IiP to set a standard for its own work.

He said: "It can be a bit arduous on the HR people, I sup-

pose, with a lot of co-ordinating to do, but my general impression is that it's a good tool.

"For instance it can help with pre-qualification for public tendering – local authority contracts often have an expectation of strong health and safety or quality policies, so IiP is one way of showing you have that. But it does cost money so it is something you would have to look carefully at if you were a tiny company."

IiP spokeswoman Alex Curling said: "IiP is designed to be flexible, so every organisation can tailor it to meet their own ambitions.

"For some that might be about gearing up for growth or improving competitiveness. Other companies will focus on internal benefits.

"IiP is still as relevant today as it was 20 years ago. In fact, research last year showed a direct link between IiP and business performance."

Not everyone is convinced. Sameer Karim, senior partner at law firm Douglas Wemys, in Leicester, said: "I can only talk for our industry, but the market place has shrunk so much that it's now down to the survival of the fittest and who has a good reputation."

£2000 Grant for Employers

taking on an Apprentice*



Apprenticeships

National Apprenticeship Service

- Are you an employer employing less than 50 people?
- Could you benefit from a grant of £2000?
- Can you support a young person in an Apprenticeship?

If you employ up to 50 members of staff and are looking to take on people aged between 16 and 18 who find themselves unemployed, you could benefit from the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE).

The Grant of £2000 is given to any employer* offering a new apprenticeship place and which then takes on an unemployed 16, 17 or 18 year old immediately. In addition to the Grant, the costs of appropriate training will be met by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS). NAS also helps employers find a suitable training provider to deliver the training programme and to recruit an apprentice.

You have to be quick, though – the Grant is only available until **14 March 2011**.

To be eligible for the Grant employers must employ fewer than 50 people and be willing to take on a 16-18 year old as an apprentice. Either the organisation or the apprentice must be based in the East Midlands. All 16-18 year olds who are not in employment and not already on an apprenticeship programme are eligible and will need to have been recruited and in work before the middle of March 2011.

*Subject to eligibility criteria

To find out more, contact the National Apprenticeship Service ESF Grant Administration Team at Chesterfield College on **01246 500500 Ext 4291** or e-mail: **age16-18@chesterfield.ac.uk**

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