

THE BOTTOM LINE

Claire Mitchell, chairwoman of Brighton-based LEADER (Local Employers Acting on Diversity, Equality and Race)



Addressing inequality in the workplace

NEWs that the richest 10% of UK residents are 100 times better off than the poorest 10% looks set to make social mobility a major battleground in the coming election.

While realising the long-promised "equality of opportunity" is clearly a job for Whitehall, employers also have a responsibility to give everyone a fair chance.

Directors and managers play one of the most powerful roles in the practicality of socio-economic inequalities by deciding who is given jobs and who is promoted.

Business must never be expected to hire people who can't do the job. After all, they exist to make money and provide jobs and taxes while generating profits for shareholders. But looking past disadvantage isn't about charity or preferential treatment.

Harnessing the talent of people who are usually overlooked is a great route to motivated, loyal staff. When done right it results in effective and efficient teams whose diversity makes them more robust to market changes, more creative at solving problems and ultimately gives the business a competitive advantage.

But how can you attract talented people from a wide range of backgrounds without resorting to positive discrimination?

Work experience can change an individual's fortunes, but it is rarely well-managed. For a start it usually goes to the wrong people.

All too often work placements are given to children of friends and others with a social connection. This perpetuates socially imbedded advantages and does nothing to help those outside well-off families.

Organisations like the Prince's Trust and the Engage Partnership can take the hassle out of work experience programmes and make sure opportunities go to those who really need it.

Of course work experience varies greatly in quality and a week divided between a photocopier and a filing cabinet is hardly inspiring. The National Council for Work Experience provides advice on this.

Recruitment is another opportunity for employers to break down inequalities. In particular, looking outside the graduate pool for trainees and entry level professionals can have surprising results.

As long as the post doesn't genuinely need a graduate's skills you often win more dedication from someone who can do the job well without the advantages of higher education than a youngster looking for a quick move up the career ladder.

And, as if all these commercial advantages weren't enough, there's one more. Being an employer is about more than making money. Giving people real chances to work hard to improve their lives can be a really good reason to get up in the morning.

All those interested in learning more can join LEADER and develop their people practices. The next seminar is tomorrow. To book, email claire.mitchell@engage.solutions.org.uk.

appointments

Garden centre's new face

STAFF at a garden centre have got a new boss after Kirsty Goble joined Haskins Roundstone in Angmering, Littlehampton, as general manager.

The 40-year-old started her career in retailing as a trainee manager at the age of 18 and gained assistant manager roles with Blockbuster Video and Toys R Us.

In 1993 she joined Woolworths as an assistant manager and was working as a store manager in Fareham until the chain's collapse at the end of 2008.

Kirsty joins Haskins from Matalan at Fareham, where she was also store manager.

She said: "I'm delighted to have the opportunity to add to the success of the Roundstone centre."



GREEN SHOOTS: Kirsty Goble



B2B telecoms firm Unicom has added to its senior management team with the appointment of Moira Robertson, above, as head of regulatory affairs.

She joins the Crawley-based company with a brief to ensure the communication provider remains compliant with all the industry regulatory requirements. The appointment will

see Unicom working more closely with Ofcom to help shape how the B2B telecoms industry is regulated in the future.

Moira, 46, who previously held compliance roles with T-Mobile, Caudwell Communications and BT, said: "Unicom can lead the way in developing industry regulation alongside our industry colleagues."

Awards honour for tragic farmer

THIS year's Sussex Food and Drink Awards was tinged with sadness.

Winner of the title of Sussex Farmer of the Year was Simon Bishop, inset, from Battle, near Hastings, who died in a car accident last year aged 51.

More than 9,000 people voted for 300-plus Sussex-based food and drink businesses, which battled it out in seven categories.

The winners were announced following a five-course dinner made from Sussex produce at the East Sussex National Golf Resort and Spa near Uckfield.

Clive Beddall, chairman of the judges, said: "Sussex food and drink producers are now leading the way in the UK's food revolution."

Kevin Powell, from Knill James, sponsor of the Sussex Farmer of the Year award, said: "Simon won this award with the highest number of votes just weeks before the tragedy."



Sussex Food Producer of the Year, sponsored by Musgrave Retail Partners – **Prosperity Brownies**, Lancing
 Sussex Drink Producer of the Year, sponsored by Mayo Wynne Baxter – **Hepworth & Co Brewers**, Horsham
 Sussex Farmer of the Year, sponsored by Knill James – **Simon Bishop**, Netherfield Place

Winners

Farm, Battle
 Sussex Young Chef of the Year, sponsored by Skills South East – **Oliver Darby**, Temptation, Brighton
 Best Sussex Eating Experience, sponsored by A Taste of Sussex – **Anise**, Felbridge Hotel and Spa,

East Grinstead
 Sussex Food Shop of the Year, sponsored by JustBiz – **Cheese Please**, Lewes
 Sussex Butcher of the Year, sponsored by Seeda – **Meads Village Butchers**, Eastbourne
 Best Sussex Farmers Market, sponsored by Natural PR – **Uckfield Farmers Market**

events

THE University of Sussex is running a series of Enterprise Thursdays events, featuring talks from people who have started their own business, charity or social enterprise.

On Thursday, Jenny Fitzpatrick, founder of The Fine Food Store, will be guest speaker, while Claire Mason, founder of Man Bites Dog PR, will give a talk.

Dan Martin, founder of The Dan Martin Foundation and Extreme Athlete, will speak on February 18 and on February 25, there will be a discussion titled Enterprising Engineers in the iPhone Era chaired by Jon Markwell, founder of Inuda Innovations.

All the events are free and take place at the Brighton and Sussex Medical School on the university's Falmer campus. Doors open at 5.30pm. For more information, visit www.sussex.ac.uk/enterprise/spring2010.

A FREE Brand Protection seminar is being hosted by law firm Mayo Wynne Baxter.

The event is on Thursday at the Lighthouse in Kensington Street, Brighton, from 6pm to 8pm.

Dean Orgill, leader of the Mayo Wynne Baxter MACI team, and patent attorney Jonathan Hancox will explain how business identities,

ideas and brands can be protected. Refreshments and networking will follow.

To book a place, email Louise Clasby on lclasby@mayowynnebaxter.co.uk.

A NETWORKING event organised by Sussex Connections will take place on February 10 at The Grand hotel in King's Road, Brighton, at 6pm. For more information and to book a place, visit www.business-scene.com.

GUEST speaker at Brighton and Hove Chamber of Commerce's next business breakfast will be Steve Martin, co-author of YES! Fifty Secrets From The Science Of Persuasion.

The event takes place on February 12 at Carluccio's in Jubilee Street, Brighton, from 7.45am to 9.30am. It costs £12 for members and £22 for guests, including breakfast.

To book a place, visit www.businessinbrighton.org.uk/event/february-12th-breakfast.

On February 26, the guest speaker will be author Lesley Thompson, a former customer services manager who now writes novels and non-fiction books. To book a place, visit www.businessinbrighton.org.uk/event/february-26th-breakfast.

THE Worthing and Adur branch of the Federation

of Small Businesses (FSB) is hosting a meeting featuring presentations on networking skills and the value of becoming a member of the FSB.

The event takes place on February 18 at the Windsor Hotel in Windsor Road, Worthing, at 6pm. Guest speakers will be Sarah Hopwood, from Mindstep, and FSB recruiter Rick Palmer. The cost is £15 per person, including a buffet. To book a place, visit www.fsb.org.uk/150.

MARKETING expert Richard Hall is holding a half-day training session.

Attendees will learn how to think of effective ways to market and how to plan a marketing proposal. The event takes place on February 19 at the Jurys Inn Hotel in Stroudley Road, Brighton. It costs £45 for Brighton and Hove Chamber of Commerce members and £75 for non-members. To book, visit www.businessinbrighton.org.uk/event/marketing-really-works.

Got a story?

If you have a business story, call Business Editor Sam Thomson on 01273 544545 or email sam.thomson@theargus.co.uk.