

# Political Monitor for IRC

*Week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> February 2010*

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# Westminster

## Government

### Vocational qualifications made simple for employers and learners



New online resources to help employers and learners explore important changes to vocational qualifications and shape the content of future vocational qualifications have been launched this week. Business Link's website now gives employers access to all they need to know about vocational qualifications and influence the changes as they take place. For learners, the **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills** website has a new online resource that provides the information and links needed to find out more about the changes. Colleges and others interested in vocational qualifications are also able to access information on changes through both web pages.

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/Content/detail.aspx?NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=411288&SubjectId=2>

### Which Boss Are You?



SME bosses can get instant tailored advice on managing their employment law obligations with a free new online tool from the **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills** (BIS). The launch of the tool 'Which boss are you?' follows a BIS study that found there are many different ways bosses manage their obligations. Some are confident and tackle it head-on whereas others admit to putting off their obligations and worry about how this might affect their business.

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/clientmicrosite/Content/Detail.aspx?ClientId=431&NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=411311&SubjectId=36>

### Employers and doctors get the facts on fit notes



People off work sick will get the support they need to get back to work earlier, as new guidance is launched this week by the **Department for Work and Pensions**. The introduction of the fit note, in place of the traditional sick note, is set to cut the cost of sick leave for employers. It is expected to benefit the British economy by an estimated £240 million over the next ten years.

From 6 April, doctors will be able to advise if a patient 'may be fit for work' and offer advice on the effects of their health condition. Doctors will have the option to advise that their patient would be able to work, subject to the employer's agreement, if

temporary changes such as reduced working hours or amended duties could be accommodated.

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/Content/detail.aspx?NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=411388&SubjectId=2>

## Rural watchdog urges councils to involve communities in public spending decisions



Successful trials of a new way of involving local people in public spending decisions have prompted the Government's rural watchdog, the **Commission for Rural Communities** (CRC), to expand the programme to a larger number of rural local authorities.

The pilot schemes stemmed from a CRC inquiry, held in 2008, to explore why rural people often feel unheard and excluded, and what redress was possible. Among the issues pinpointed by the inquiry were that some rural people feel they have less influence on public spending decisions than their urban neighbours and that their priorities are, therefore, overlooked.

Crispin Moor, Executive Director at the CRC says: "The pilots have proved highly successful, so much so we are now recommending the approach to other councils serving rural areas. Participatory budgeting offers rural people their own say in local community investments. "

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/Content/detail.aspx?NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=411352&SubjectId=2>

## Scotland

### Scottish Employers – PAYE attention to spring changes

**HMRC** is writing to all employers in Scotland this month to remind them that, from this year, they must file their Employer Annual Returns online by the 19 May deadline – there is no longer a paper filing option for small employers with fewer than 50 staff. So, if you file your return on paper, even if it's before 19 May, you could receive a penalty. There are around 84,000 small employers with fewer than 50 staff in Scotland who will be affected by these changes.

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/clientmicrosite/Content/Detail.aspx?ClientId=257&NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=411295&SubjectId=36>

## Stakeholder

### All party line-up of speakers to appear at FSB Annual Conference

Small businesses will be hearing from a cross party line-up at the **FSB's** Annual Conference this year, just before the country goes to the polls.

Lord Mandelson and the First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond will both address the conference, held at the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre, as small businesses examine how they can support a full economic recovery this year. Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron and Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, Nick Clegg, have also been invited.

The event – the largest non-Governmental small business conference in the country – will be opened by the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, Peter Stephen and the theme will be 'The Brave Heart of Small Businesses'.

<http://www.fsb.org.uk/News.aspx?loc=general&rec=5898>

### The prices supermarket giants Asda and Tesco raised before Christmas

In the run up to Christmas 2009 leading supermarkets Asda and Tesco announced millions of pounds worth of price cuts. What many shoppers did not know was that thousands of prices at those retailers also increased in that period.

**The Guardian** has used data compiled by third party analysts from the Asda and Tesco online stores to show how many price rises were imposed between December 9 and December 22. The companies say that prices on their websites are reflected nationally in their stores - and that the majority of the rises reflected products coming off promotions.

The full list of lines increased and percentage rises can be found here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/datablog/2010/feb/12/tesco-asda-prise-rises-christmas>

### Flexible working 'good for heart and soul'



People who can choose their own working hours enjoy better physical and mental health, a report has suggested. Researchers for the Cochrane Library found employees who had control of their hours could have better blood pressure and heart rates.

The report can be found at: <http://www.cochrane.org/reviews/en/ab008009.html>