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## Skills & Careers

### Will staff 'Right to Train' boost skills?

But don't force the issue, warns IT training company...

Tags: [techies](#), [skills](#), [training](#)

By [Natasha Lomas](#)

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The government has launched a consultation on a proposal to give employees a legal right to request training - describing investment in skills as key to bolstering the economy.

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But could such a right really help to tackle the skills shortage in the IT industry?

One-third of employers do not train their staff and eight million employees receive no training every year, according to the government.

The government's skills minister, John Denham, said the 'Right to Train' proposal, which would apply to all employees who have worked for their employer for 26 weeks, could enable around 300,000 people per year to receive skills training who otherwise would not get any.

Denham said in a statement: "Investment in skills is key to ensuring we come through with a stronger economy and making sure individuals can make the most of their abilities. But we have still not persuaded every employer of the importance of skills.

"We need to find new ways to bring the drive for skills into every workplace and to every worker, which is why we are consulting on a new right for workers to request time to train."

But IT recruitment company InterQuest believes the government's proposal is unlikely to make a big difference as there is no obligation on employers to actually grant the training requests.

David Bevan, director of communications at InterQuest, told silicon.com: "Training should be something that companies do by rote rather than people having to go and ask for it. I can't see that there would be any great imperative on [employers] now to respond any more positively just because the government says people are allowed to ask."

Bevan said employers should already recognise the benefits of training staff, especially in the fast-paced IT industry where in-demand skills can change so rapidly.

He said: "People look for companies that will develop them,

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particularly in IT where keeping up to date with the latest skills, the latest packages and releases is absolutely crucial to your career. If you're a company that trains, people don't need to leave to get that experience.

"The whole point is that any employer worth its salt is going to be training and should be training. Companies use the argument, well what if I train someone and I move away? The response is well what if I don't train them and they stay? The company just simply doesn't get any better."

IT training company Firebrand Training is not convinced the government's plan is the best way to tackle the skills shortage either. Company director Robert Chapman told silicon.com: "I'm not a great believer in legislating for these sorts of things."

Chapman said government help with skills would be more welcome if it took the form of tax breaks encouraging companies to invest in training. "Forcing people to have time off or the right to time off I just think that creates negative contention in an organisation. I just don't think this sort of force feeding is a particularly clever way of going about it."

However there's some evidence the market is realising the importance of techie career development, according to InterQuest's Bevan, who said IT training is more valued than it used to be and budgets are being specifically targeted towards IT as businesses realise IT investment is essential to give them competitive edge.

"HR has a much greater sway in today's IT department than they used to," he said.

The IT skills in greatest demand at the moment are web 2.0 agile development skills, such as Java and .NET, while people with hybrid business and technical skills can be the hardest to find, especially in some financial markets, according to Bevan.

He added: "I don't think [the 'Right to Train' will] make that much difference but at least it gets people talking about training again. It might give some people the motivation to say well maybe I will go and ask my boss whether I can do that course or go away for a couple of days because I've always wanted to study that. If it does great."

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