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Fancy something for Nothing?

David and Mark at Priestman & Associates Consultancy have been facilitating StoneTrain's Specialist Apprenticeship Programme for a number of years.

But what is a Specialist Apprenticeship Programme, or SAP?

The SAP is delivered in conjunction with the National Specialist Accreditation Centre (a division of ConstructionSkills). It is open to employees of any age if their firm is willing to sponsor them in their chosen discipline as either a Façade Cleaner, Façade Restorer, Stone Fixer or Heritage Stonemason. They don't need to be apprentices, simply employees yet to formalise their construction qualifications via NVQ recognition.

Mark Priestman explains: "The SAP is an exciting training tool. It enables employers to train their employees with minimal disruption from the work routine. They gain a nationally recognised apprenticeship, an NVQ and the ability to apply to CSCS for the appropriate work card."

David Priestman adds: "It really is something for nothing! The cost of the SAP is pitched at the same value as the grant ConstructionSkills will pay to levy payers who enrol their employees plus, in 2011, there is a £1,000 bonus grant for all registrations, payable to the employer."

StoneTrain offer a range of SAPs. The Façade Preservation SAP is for Cleaners and / or Restorers. Learners have 20 days off-site training over the two year programme. The rest of the time they are observed by work mentors and our own assessors. At the end of the course they can achieve a Level 2 NVQ Certificate in Façade Preservation. And experience shows they gain the confidence of knowing they are a time-served tradesman or woman.

The Stone Fixer SAP works on the same parameters, but leads to the Level 2 NVQ Diploma in Stone Fixing. For both of these programmes the employer also has to commit to progressing their employee through necessary courses such as FAAP and IPAH and allowing them leave to attend the StoneTrain off-site training days. They also have to permit StoneTrain on-site to assess their site activity and gather evidence.

David Priestman was heavily involved in the design of these two SAPs in conjunction with Alan Wemyss, SAP Scheme Manager at ConstructionSkills.

One learner, Tony Gagg of Stonewest Group, said: "I joined Stonewest as a labourer and have now started my Level 2 course in Façade Preservation. The apprentice course has been great. To meet other people from other firms doing the same work as me has its own rewards. We are all here because we want to learn, and it's always interesting to see how people from the other firms do things."

Since completing the SAP, Tony has gone on to achieve a Level 3 Diploma in Site Supervision and proves to be a popular and valued member of his team.

A new SAP was developed this year under the co-ordination of Stubbings Business Solutions, with David and Mark involved in the assessment process. It is the Heritage Masonry SAP, a one year programme.

This time, employers need to commit their worker to 30 days off-site training. This training is conducted at the prestigious venue of the World Heritage Site, Fountains Abbey, owned by the National Trust. The training is conducted under the expert gaze of Henry Rumbold and applicants must already hold stonemasonry qualifications up to Level 2.

Following the completion of the programme, successful learners achieve the Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Heritage Skills Masonry and can apply to CSCS for the much sought after gold Heritage card.

Each of these SAPs represents amazing value to contractors. StoneTrain are currently taking details of interested parties who would like to enrol on any of the programmes anywhere in the UK. Mark Priestman gives this encouragement: "We would recommend giving this serious thought immediately in order to be in time to achieve the bonus grant, as we must have names very soon."

StoneTrain continues to provide NVQ recognition for the experienced worker, too, in the form of on-site assessment programmes for Cleaners, Restorers, Bankers, Fixers, Floor Fixers, Heritage Masons, Site Supervisors and Project Managers. For more information email mark.priestman@stonetrain.org.uk. To find out more about StoneTrain's range of business leadership courses email nigel.stubbings@stonetrain.org.uk. Or to enquire about any of the training services available StoneTrain on Tel: 01303 856103.