

Welcome to the Summer 2016 issue of The Information Professional, a regular newsletter for Cobweb's subscribers and partners.

In this issue, we bring you up to date with news about our team's recent work supplying information services for business support professionals.



## Growth Hubs and start-up support



It's now more than six years since the nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in England were replaced with 39 locally accountable business bodies, the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

Working mainly through LEPs, during 2014 and 2015, the Growth Hubs were rolled out as the vehicle for business support at LEP level. Since the announcement of the LEPs, it has taken almost six years for all 41 Growth Hubs to establish their presence – many look like mini Business Links with direct delivery, whereas most are more inclusive.

Growth Hubs are local public/private partnerships, often led by LEPs and local authorities, designed to provide a single local access point for business support, and to join up different sources so business owners can get the support they need quickly and easily. Growth Hub partners include a range of organisations, such as the FSB and chambers of commerce, universities, enterprise agencies, libraries, colleges and others.

There is no single defined model for a Growth Hub because they are designed to reflect local needs and partnership arrangements, but all Growth Hubs have committed to the following:

- To raise awareness of business support, so firms know where to go to get help.
- To offer diagnostic and signposting, so firms can be referred to the right help quickly.
- To run networking events so that business owners can meet each other, make contacts and seize commercial opportunities.

Cobweb has been working in partnership with Doug Scott, previously CEO of TEDCO and former Chairman of the National Enterprise Network, to review and assess the impact of LEPs and Growth Hubs on the provision of business support.

Following extensive research into the 41 Growth Hubs and their varying provision of business information and support, Doug has produced a report that summarises the approach taken in each LEP area.

The full report is available to download from our website at [www.cobwebinfo.com](http://www.cobwebinfo.com).

So, how well have the LEPs and Growth Hubs performed in providing information and support for start ups and small firms?

Doug's assessment has found that, with local Growth Hubs and their partners now trusted with the task of keeping their local businesses properly informed, certain areas are doing this much better than others. Some LEPs have taken the 'growth' message and made it central to their Growth Hub's purpose, but most have a more inclusive approach to their local business communities. Others have produced Growth Hubs that look like mini Business Links, with direct delivery of business support.

At the moment, there is no clear indication as to which model will work most effectively over the long term, so we would welcome any feedback on the findings in Doug's report. You can comment via our website or e-mail us at [enquiries@cobwebinfo.com](mailto:enquiries@cobwebinfo.com).

*"We wanted a decentralised system and that's exactly what we've got; warts and all."*

**Doug Scott**  
What You See Is All There Is



## SUBSCRIBER CASE STUDY:

# Right Management career experts



## COBRA FOR CAREER TRANSITION

COBRA is used by a number of organisations that specialise in supporting clients through career transition.

The top five self-employment guides downloaded by careers coaches and their clients in 2015 were:

- 1 Management Consultant
- 2 IT Consultant
- 3 Executive Coach
- 4 Freelance Business Trainer
- 5 Buy-to-let Landlord

## WHAT IS COBRA?

COBRA is our market-leading online business reference resource, which provides a unique range of guides to the key trading, compliance and market issues faced by 600 different types of small and micro-business.

For more information about COBRA, visit our website or call Lucy Graves on 0191 461 8000.

Right Management are global career experts with over 35 years' experience in career management. During this time, they have conducted over 12 million interviews each year and successfully transitioned more than three million people into new roles.

The support Right Management provides includes one-to-one support from expert career coaches, as well as access to a range of market-leading tools, through their online portal, *Right Everywhere*.

Marcia Brookes is a Job Resource Consultant at Right Management. For Marcia it's crucial that, with such a diverse range of clients, they have the tools they need to support people from any background, in any location in the UK. "We need a range of tools and COBRA fits well into that. It covers such a wide range of different opportunities that people may be considering."

While the majority of their clients want to secure a new permanent position, a significant number also consider self-employment. "Self-employment is a serious consideration for a lot of people. For some people it is not the right option, so we do run sessions with them. Our expert self-employment coaches ask 'is self-employment right for you?'" says Marcia.

Given that many of Right Management's clients are new to self-employment, the guidance in COBRA's Business Information Factsheets (BIFs) has proven especially useful. "COBRA covers all the areas that people haven't even started to think about. It doesn't tell them the answers, it just highlights what they need to know and signposts where to find out more information. I think that is really, really good," says Marcia.

*"We need a range of tools and COBRA fits well into that. It covers such a wide range of different opportunities that people may be considering"*

**Marcia Brookes, Right Management**



"People look at COBRA and they love it because it's such a simple resource to use. When they see the wealth and depth of information that is in there, plus the links to other sources, they get completely blown away. It's so rich in information".

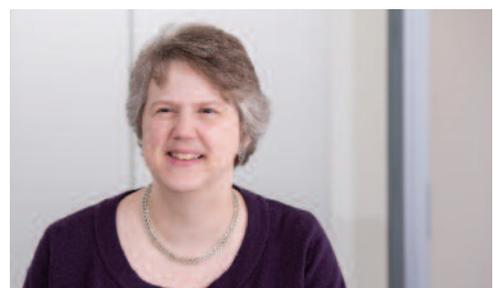
The career coaches also have an important job of signposting their clients to other sources of business support, which is when COBRA's Local Area Profiles (LAPs) are particularly helpful.

"I always make sure clients are aware of the LAPs because they just don't realise the wealth of organisations that operate locally to where they live. Clients may have already heard about support that is available from their local council and chamber of commerce, but the LAPs cover lots of other organisations that provide support and advice, workspace and financial support".

For Right Management's coaches, who only have a fixed amount of time to work with clients, it is crucial that they can really focus on their areas of expertise.

"Because so much is covered in COBRA, and it provides a lot of the fundamental information clients need, it means we can really concentrate on the tailored one-to-one support and advice clients can't get from a database", says Marcia.

"COBRA is essential for the self-employment support we provide," she says. "It's a fantastic resource. In this field, we couldn't operate without it.



# Brexit and business support



Following the referendum decision to leave the EU, Cobweb will report the facts and provide updates over the coming months about the impact of Brexit on business regulations, local and regional development, and funding for enterprise support initiatives as the various issues unfold.

## REPORTING THE FACTS AND ISSUES

Cobweb's role as a provider of news and current awareness for business support practitioners will be crucial once the exit negotiations commence. We will ensure that subscribers to our free and premium newsletters are kept abreast of the facts about any issues relating to local business development, devolution to the regions, regulation of business, structural and other EU funding up to and beyond completion of the exit deal.

## REGULATORY ISSUES

A considerable amount of Cobweb's content accessed by our customers is based around EU regulations, directives and initiatives. This is both in COBRA factsheets and reports, and the various news bulletins we publish for a variety of business support providers. Cobweb's belief at this stage is that any new trade deal with EU will require the UK to continue to accept and comply with all existing and any new EU legislation. However, the context surrounding compliance for business traders and

employers in the UK may change as the exit negotiations emerge and are finally agreed. Changes to Cobweb's content will reflect those negotiations and agreements as they happen.

## FUNDING FOR ENTERPRISE SUPPORT

For several years, many of Cobweb's customers have been delivering enterprise skills training and support for business start up, growth, innovation and R&D with the benefit of funding through the EU structural funds such as the ESF, ERDF and EAFRD. In addition, the EU has been a key supporter of entrepreneurship and enterprise education through specific funding initiatives such as the ERASMUS and TEMPUS programmes. An exit from the EU will have an impact on business support organisations who run these types of EU-funded initiatives and programmes. While we understand that current EU funding allocated to the UK will be honoured up to 2020, Cobweb will work closely with our customers, providing timely updates to help them understand any changes and issues around funding for enterprise support as soon as they become clear.

# COBRA usage on the rise



Usage of **COBRA** continued to increase over the last year, with over 534,000 downloads of reports and factsheets in 2015 by business advisers and their clients, students and members.

This is an increase over 2014, when 496,000 factsheets were downloaded. Usage of business start-up guides (Business Opportunity Profiles) from COBRA increased to 234,000 downloads, and demand was highest for guides about coffee shops and cafés, consultants and hairdressers.

With support concentrating on start ups and traders in the early stages of their business, downloads of the most popular Business Information Factsheets also increased, with information about business and marketing plans, business legal structures and tax, National Insurance and finance at the top of the list.

The top 20 BIF titles in 2015 were as follows:

- Writing a Business Plan **4361**
- Setting up in Business as a Sole Trader **3725**
- Choosing the Right Legal Status for your Business **3661**
- Setting up in Business as a Private Limited Company **3011**
- A Checklist for Start Up Market Research **2557**
- Developing a Marketing Plan **2482**
- Creating a Marketing Strategy for Your Business **2238**
- Running a Business from Home **2209**
- Tax, National Insurance and VAT **2153**
- Promoting a Business Website **1927**
- Profiling Your Target Market **1917**
- Insurance Cover for Business **1899**
- Choosing and Registering a Business Name **1765**
- Sources of Finance for Starting a Business **1735**
- 20 Tips to Help You Choose a Business Idea **1709**
- Costing and Pricing a Product or Service **1679**
- Setting Up a Community Interest Company **1676**
- How to Forecast Cash Flow **1658**
- Tax Self-assessment for the Self-employed **1550**
- Setting up in Business as a Partnership **1540**

# Welcome to new **COBRA** subscribers

For almost 20 years, hundreds of business support organisations have been using COBRA on a daily basis to support start ups and small business owners. We are pleased to welcome the following organisations as our most recent subscribers to the service:

- **The Forum of Private Business (FPB)** – The Information and Member Communications Team use COBRA to support member engagement.
- **East Ayrshire Council** – Business advisers delivering the Business Gateway East Ayrshire service have access to COBRA to support their small business clients.
- **Wales Co-operative Centre** – Business advisers use COBRA to support the development of co-operative enterprises in Wales.
- **Staffordshire University** – A team running an enterprise project has taken out a COBRA licence to help them support students to start and run their own business.
- **Newport City Council** – The economic development team use COBRA to help them support their small business clients.
- **Heart of the South West Growth Hub** – Advisers on the HOTSW helpline use COBRA when dealing with enquiries from start ups and small firms.
- **London College of Fashion** – Students and staff can access COBRA from anywhere on the London College of Fashion campus.

## Conferences and awards



**Cobweb continues to champion** the work of enterprise educators and other practitioners working in enterprise support delivery.

Cobweb is delighted to be sponsoring a National Enterprise Educators Award, to be presented at the **International Entrepreneurship Educators Conference (IEEC) 2016** in September, hosted by Liverpool John Moores University. At last year's IEEC Conference, Cobweb sponsored the FE Enterprise Champions award, which was won by a team led by

Christine Bissex of the South East Wales FE YES Hub/The College Merthyr Tydfil.

Cobweb will also be sponsoring the National Enterprise Network's 'Unsung Hero' Award, which will be presented at the **National Enterprise Network Conference** in November. Last year's award, again sponsored by Cobweb, was won by Martin Cooper of Birmingham Chamber.

Our Managing Director, Marianne Whitfield, is involved in the first Digital Leaders North East Summit in Newcastle on 10 November 2016. The theme of the summit is Smart Data.

If you have any queries about **COBRA** or wish to enquire about subscriptions and licensed access, please contact **Lucy Graves** on **0191 461 8000**.

### COBWEB SERVICES

Thousands of business support professionals use Cobweb's unique range of information resources.

#### COBRA

Our premium business reference resource, available by annual subscription. For a free trial, call **Lucy Graves** on **0191 461 8000**.

#### BAD News

Free weekly current awareness bulletin for business advisers and support professionals. To subscribe, e-mail [badnews@cobwebinfo.com](mailto:badnews@cobwebinfo.com).

#### News services

We accept commissions to write news content for newsletters and business support websites. For more information, call **Lucy Graves** on **0191 461 8000**.

#### Content curation

We supply Growth Hubs and other support organisations with feeds of information that are published on their own websites. For more information, call **Marianne Whitfield** on **0191 461 8020**.