

**PRESS RELEASE
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**Funding boosts fresh opportunities for ex-military in food supply chain**

Ex-forces and career changers are being targeted in a bold new programme to skill up the fresh produce sector.

Kickstarted by a £450,000 Government grant for flexi-apprenticeships, the renowned food supply chain training provider, [MDS](https://www.mds-ltd.co.uk), is using the funding to create a training programme for non-graduates and triple the number of its secondments in the sector.

MDS, which collaborates with over 60 food and fresh produce businesses across the UK to run its Leadership & Management training scheme for degree graduates, will be introducing an Operations & Development scheme tailored to non-graduates already in the workplace.

The existing Leadership & Management training scheme will also be opened up to military service leavers with leadership experience.

MDS Chief Operating Officer Sapphira Waterson, who has a long-standing connection with the armed forces through her work with the charity SSAFA, said:

*“This funding is an exciting and long-planned step for MDS to expand our popular leadership training and attract others on a different work ladder with diverse perspectives and skill sets into our sector.*

*“Giving ex-military personnel a route into the sector has been a passion of mine for both the opportunity it gives food supply chain businesses and those leaving the forces to develop a compelling career. As team players with a bias for decision making and completing tasks, ex-service personnel are a perfect fit for our fast-paced sector, and in turn it is a route for them to continue to develop professionally and personally when they leave the military.*

*“Equally it offers exciting new challenges for others in the workplace who don’t have a degree but have a drive and interest to develop their careers. They may have come from retail, healthcare or hospitality, or are returning to work after a break.*

*“I would urge all food supply chain businesses to reassess how they can maximise on this and benefit from strengthening their operations with high calibre trainees at different levels, from shop floor to management.”*

**In order for the programme to reach its full potential, MDS is calling on fresh food and food supply businesses to look at the opportunity in their own businesses to bring new talent in. MDS is looking to nearly triple the number of training placements, from 78 to 220, available in food businesses.**

For businesses in the sector, working with MDS is the best way to upskill without any extra hassle for employers, says Richard Whittle who is an MDS board member and MD of engineering experts Protolan, which has taken over x trainees on MDS secondments:

*“This is a real opportunity for food supply chain businesses to look at their operations as well as management level roles, particularly as the availability of labour in the industry changes. By joining MDS, all the leg work is done. The MDS team has huge experience in recruiting candidates that are of the right calibre and fit, and proactively support with relevant training and mentoring, all of which will help drive the business forward. The government funding is time limited though and we need to get started fast, so we are calling on food supply chain businesses to sign up and help us get our first secondments in place this April. Ask for as many trainees as you need – this is such a golden opportunity.”*

For nearly 40 years, MDS, of which former Grocery Code Adjudicator, Christine Tacon, is Chair, has run a two-year Leadership and Management programme, which currently sees 78 Trainees placed every six months primarily with food supply chain businesses. Six-month secondments include roles in marketing, project management and engineering, supported by active mentoring and skills development from MDS and the Apprenticeship College.

The new Operations & Development schemecreated as a result of the funding will fill roles at operational level. These are hands-on roles, that could start on a production line, but the trainees will have the aptitude and desire to move into more senior roles, for example packhouse manager. In total, there will now by 220 placements available every six months.

The government funding package was announced in March 2021 as part of Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s Budget, with the aim of tackling the national skills shortage by encouraging businesses to invest in their workforce.

The £451,078 funding will allow MDS to employ additional staff to recruit Operations and Development trainees, manage the new programme and pay for the apprenticeship training.

To find out more as a business or to apply as a trainee, contact Kirsty at MDS kirsty@mds-ltd.co.uk or tel:

**Editors’ Notes**

* **Management Development Services Ltd (MDS)** [**www.mds-ltd.co.uk/**](https://www.mds-ltd.co.uk/)
	+ MDS was set up in 1986 by a group of forward-thinking growers concerned about the shortage of skilled managers within the industry. It quickly established itself as a leading training provider in the fresh food, produce, horticultural and agricultural industry. Since then, it has expanded steadily as companies seek to safeguard the future by attracting and providing training for the right calibre of recruit.
	+ Today, MDS encompasses the whole supply chain of vegetables, salads, fruit, flowers, plants, arable and prepared food products not only based in the UK but also for operations in many countries around the world.
	+ MDS represents a consortium of member companies comprising growers, suppliers and supermarkets. There is consistent interest from potential new members who wish to be involved in what is now seen as a ‘model’ for specialist management training.
	+ The strength of MDS comes from members working in partnership with a common goal, even though some may be competitors in the commercial world. It is run by a Board of Directors appointed from within the membership, with day-to-day management support from the office team in Peterborough.
	+ As part of MDS, businesses will have access to MDS’ unique training programmes for their own staff funded through the Apprenticeship Levy.
* **National Apprenticeship Week** <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/influencers/naw-2022>
* **UK Government funding for new flexible apprenticeships** <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cash-boost-to-create-new-flexible-approach-to-apprenticeships>
	+ Organisations could apply for funding between £100,000 and £1 million to boost the number of apprentices they can recruit.