# Learning from the best

Examples of best practice from providers of apprenticeships in underperforming vocational areas

This good practice report examines the work of 39 providers of work-based learning, including independent learning providers, employer providers and colleges. These have been successful in providing apprenticeships in three currently underperforming vocational areas: hospitality, motor vehicle, and retail; and two historically underperforming areas that have improved to the national average in recent years: care and construction. The report describes the factors which contributed to sustaining high numbers, or increasing the numbers, of apprentices completing their qualifications, and to improving the time taken for them to do this.

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# Executive summary

The overall proportion of apprentices who successfully completed their frameworks rose from 49% in 2005–06 to 71% in 2008–09.[1] Further progress still needs to be made in improving outcomes. Some individual vocational areas have shown less marked rates of improvement.

Between October 2009 and January 2010, inspectors visited 39 providers to identify the key features of successful provision in three currently underperforming vocational areas: hospitality, motor vehicle, and retail; and two historically underperforming areas that have improved to the national average in recent years: care and construction. The providers visited had been judged to be either good or outstanding for their overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection or had shown a recent history of sustained improvement in apprenticeship success rates in one or more of these particularly challenging areas.[2]

Inspectors found common factors that contributed to high overall success rates in the providers surveyed and which improved the time that apprentices took to complete their qualifications.

There is an important role for both providers and employers in making sure that young people are well-suited for the apprenticeship they wish to undertake. Recruiting learners with good ability in mathematics was particularly important in motor vehicle and construction frameworks, as was the testing of manual dexterity. Initial assessment was used well to inform the selection of learners and to identify their needs for support early on. Apprentices who had previously undertaken vocational or taster courses while still at school succeeded better as a group than those who did not have such experience. An evaluation of each new apprentice's job role helped in planning training and assessment by identifying gaps in the apprentice's experience, particularly in hospitality and retail.

All the providers in the survey had developed their engagement with employers well. There were many examples of flexible training and assessment to meet employers' needs, such as evening and weekend training workshops in care and the employment of assessors with specialist experience in retail. All the employers visited were engaged well in training their apprentices, most of whom were supported by staff, often previous apprentices, acting as mentors.

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[1] See the Statistical First Release June 2010 which can be found at:
www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_supplementary_tables/.
[2] The sample included work-based learning providers, colleges of further education, a voluntary sector organisation, a consortia of providers and several large employers that manage their own training contracts. The term 'provider' is used generically in the report unless the findings refer to a particular type of provider.

Where timely success rates were high, managers used management information effectively to plan the work of their assessors. The continuity brought about by having one assessor (or training officer) throughout the training programme was a positive feature commented on by almost all the apprentices and the employers who were surveyed. The assessors acted as a key point of contact between the provider, the employer and the apprentice, promoting training and assessment.

Regular visits by assessors to the workplace and effective reviews helped apprentices to make good progress. In almost half the providers surveyed, making better use of evidence from the workplace contributed to increasing the number of apprentices completing their frameworks and reducing the time they took to do so. Particularly in construction, measures to provide additional assessment opportunities with other employers had helped to counteract the negative impact of the recession on timely success rates.

The use of individual learning plans was one of the most variable features, even among these good and outstanding providers. Commonly, the best practice, particularly in care and retail, was found where much of the delivery and assessment were on employers' premises to ensure that training objectives were met. There were many examples of the good provision of key skills, starting from induction and then contextualised so that the apprentices and employers could see the relevance of these to their vocational area.

## Key findings

- Where data were available from the providers surveyed, it was clear that those apprentices who had gained prior experience of work-related learning in their vocational areas at 14 to 16 through courses such as Young Apprenticeships were more successful, in terms of progress and completion, than those starting straight from school without the benefit of this experience.

- In several large motor vehicle and construction providers, arrangements for the preliminary testing and screening of applicants were effective in selecting those who were more likely to cope well with the mathematical requirements of the frameworks.

- Almost all the providers in the survey saw improved initial advice and guidance, given at recruitment events, in interviews or online, as having a positive impact on recruiting learners into the right area of learning and therefore reducing the drop-out rates later on.

- Early initial assessment had a positive impact on the take-up of learning support, a key factor in improving success rates. Where data were available, apprentices who received learning support as a result of initial assessment did as well as, or better than, those who did not require it.

- In almost half the providers surveyed, focusing on the planning of training and assessment, and making better use of evidence from the workplace, helped to

increase the number of apprentices who successfully completed their frameworks and reduced the time they took to do so.

■ In the best providers seen, the individual learning plan was used well to meet the needs of each apprentice and this had a positive impact on progress and the timely completion of frameworks.

■ Almost all the providers in the survey provided good training in key skills. The key skills were contextualised to the areas of learning and introduced early on, so that apprentices saw that they were relevant and enjoyed the learning. Application of number at level 2 was the most difficult area for many apprentices to pass and this had a negative impact on timely success rates.

■ The strong vocational backgrounds of the providers' staff and having one main assessor throughout training were key factors in engaging employers and apprentices.

■ Good support from the employers in the survey was a key common factor in raising success rates, allowing the providers to capture work-based evidence more effectively and to coordinate on- and off-the-job training.

■ Flexible training and assessment met the needs of employers and apprentices while at the same time increasing the amount of evidence derived from the workplace.

■ Regular contact between the staff of the provider and the employers in the survey focused on setting targets to provide work-based evidence so that apprentices made progress.

■ Good use of management information in planning and monitoring the work of assessors was a key factor in driving the timely success of their apprentices.

## Recommendations

The National Apprenticeship Service should:

■ work with sector skills councils and local authorities to improve initial advice and guidance about apprenticeships and the promotion of progression routes from 14 to 19 pathways

■ encourage better providers to offer increased numbers of apprenticeships in the areas where they excel

■ further develop and implement strategies for promoting training to under-represented groups by working with employers and sector skills councils.

Providers, in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, should:

■ strengthen initial advice and guidance further to ensure that potential apprentices are placed on the right apprenticeship programmes and are made aware of progression opportunities to further education or training

■ make better use of the results of initial assessment to draw up individual

learning plans that set out clearly how support will be provided for individual apprentices, in conjunction with their employers

■ ensure that they set key skills securely in the context of the main area of vocational learning and introduce them early on

■ continue to develop their strategies for engaging employers in order to make the best use of training and assessment opportunities and to develop cooperation between employers where assessment opportunities are limited.

# Background

1. As of 2010, there were over 190 apprenticeship frameworks, extending from traditional craft and skilled trades to parts of the service sector with no established tradition of apprenticeships. In 2008–09 there were 239,900 starts.

2. An apprenticeship framework generally contains three separately certified elements, all of which must be achieved to complete the framework successfully and gain the award. The three elements are:

■ a knowledge-based theory element, typically certified through a qualification known as a technical certificate

■ a competence-based element, typically certified through a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)

■ key skills in literacy and numeracy (expected to be replaced by functional skills from March 2011).

3. Three levels of apprenticeship are available for those aged 16 and over: Apprenticeships (which include an NVQ level 2 qualification equivalent to five good GCSE passes); Advanced Apprenticeships (which include an NVQ level 3 qualification, equivalent to two A-level passes); and Higher Apprenticeships (which include an NVQ level 4 qualification).

4. Apprenticeships are provided partly or wholly in the workplace. Where partly, there is an element of training and assessment 'off-the-job', usually by a training provider or a college. Apprentices take externally marked tests, often online, and develop portfolios of evidence to support the assessment of the NVQ and key skills.

5. Currently, the performance of apprenticeships is measured by calculating annual Qualification Success Rates for every training provider, showing the percentage of learners achieving an apprenticeship framework. Two separate measures, 'overall' and 'timely' success rates, are used:

■ the overall success rate measures the proportion of apprentices who achieved their apprenticeship framework against the overall number of

leavers who embarked on the frameworks

■ the timely success rate measures only apprentices who achieved their apprenticeship framework by no later than 90 days after their planned end date. This is expressed as a percentage of the number of apprentices who are expected to leave in the year.

Combined success rates combine the rates for Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships, giving an overall view of the performance of apprenticeships.

6. Between 2006–07 and 2008–09, success rates for Apprenticeships improved from 60% to 70% while success rates for Advanced Apprenticeships improved from 56% to 72%. In the same period, timely success rates for Apprenticeships improved from 48% to 59% while timely success rates for Advanced Apprenticeships improved from 42% to 54%. Timely success rates remain well below overall success rates, a difference of 11 and 18 percentage points, respectively, in 2008–09.[3]

7. The five areas selected for the survey all contained a considerable number of apprentices. Two areas (care and construction) which had performed poorly historically had made considerable and sustained improvements. Three (motor vehicle, retail, and hospitality and catering) were performing below the national average in 2007–08 when the areas were selected.

# The key success factors

## Recruitment and selection of apprentices

8. In the providers surveyed, the way in which apprentices were recruited varied, depending on the type of provider offering training and the particular area of learning. Apprentices were recruited either directly by employers or by the training provider or a mixture of both of these.

9. Thorough procedures for recruitment and selection helped to improve both the overall and timely success rates of apprenticeships. Several of the larger national construction and motor vehicle employers surveyed set higher entry qualifications than seen in other areas as a prerequisite of acceptance onto apprenticeships. They combined this with online application methods that included preliminary testing of English and mathematics. This helped them to ascertain whether applicants' educational attainment was at a level that was sufficient for them to cope with the more difficult areas of apprenticeship

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[3] These data, provided by the Data Service, are based on revised methods of calculation, agreed with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Recent changes relate to timely success rates, where the period of grace during which apprentices completing their qualifications can be counted as 'timely' has been extended from one to three months after the planned completion date. This method for calculating success rates is now used in all Qualification Success Rate individual provider reports which can be accessed on the provider gateway.

frameworks, particularly where well-developed mathematical skills were required. This was particularly important for these employers as progression to Advanced Apprenticeships, with their more demanding requirements for the application of number, was the norm.

10. Online applications allowed geographical sifting of applicants, matching them to the centres closest to them where vacancies arose. Analysis of data at two of the employers showed that improved retention over the first six months of their training programmes was linked to the shorter distances travelled by apprentices to work. The following describes the main components of an effective online application process.

> A national construction provider had a useful and informative website that provided information, advice and guidance to prospective apprentices. The online application process was clearly explained and included a Basic Skills Agency assessment of literacy and numeracy, together with an assessment of aptitude. Data showed a close correlation between high scores for numeracy in the initial assessment and subsequent overall success rates. Learners who would require additional support were identified early by the online assessment, allowing effective support arrangements to be put in place. Success rates had improved since the process was introduced. It also allowed for improved monitoring of applicants by gender and ethnicity. This helped in evaluating initiatives that were designed to encourage the participation of under-represented groups in construction.

11. The colleges and work-based learning providers surveyed did not set entry qualifications at such a high level as the large employers for construction and motor vehicle apprenticeships. Their work in these two vocational areas was mainly with smaller construction firms and garages, who recruited their apprentices directly. They also had fewer applicants for the number of places available. The key to their successful provision of apprenticeships, compared with less successful providers, was their long-term training relationship with the small employers who recruited apprentices based more on appropriate aptitude for working in the industries than on their entry qualifications.

12. In the providers surveyed, increasing numbers of young people had progressed to apprenticeships from 14–16-year-old 'school link' courses, particularly in care, construction, hospitality and motor vehicle. Where data were available, it was clear that learners who progressed to apprenticeships from a link programme had been more successful, in terms of progress and completion, than those who started straight from school. One car manufacturer had direct progression to its apprenticeship programmes for some of its Young Apprentices. The knowledge and skills they had gained previously helped them to be 'fast tracked' through the apprenticeship framework, improving timely

success. Work experience improved their understanding of the industry and they were often known to their future employers. At one of the colleges visited, a good proportion of motor vehicle apprentices had progressed from the 14–19 provision where there was a Young Apprenticeship programme. In both these examples, the success rates for the individuals concerned were higher than for those who had not been Young Apprentices.

13. Several of the work-based learning providers surveyed who worked with smaller employers developed their own specialist staff to engage with employers, emphasising the benefits of training to their businesses. These staff had a detailed understanding of work-based learning that helped to increase the numbers of appropriate employers recruited that had a commitment to training, which helped to improve success rates.

14. Almost all the providers surveyed showed that the good use of initial advice and guidance given at recruitment events or interviews had a positive impact on recruiting learners into the appropriate area. Examples of the improvements made included:

   ■ ensuring that applicants were interviewed by staff with first-hand experience of working in the vocational area

   ■ explaining in detail what was required in order to complete an apprenticeship

   ■ providing an overview of working in particular industries and related career paths.

   Progression routes to further learning and career progression were emphasised.

15. A small number of examples of work tasters and trial periods with supportive employers were also seen in care, hospitality and retail. They enabled potential apprentices to experience work in the particular area of learning and to assess whether it was suitable for them, while also developing their self-confidence. Two large retail employers used an initial training programme within their companies to help to select apprentices.

16. Four of the seven colleges in the survey had become more flexible in allowing transfers between full-time, college-based courses and apprenticeships, and vice versa, helping to keep learners in training. For example, inspectors interviewed several hospitality apprentices at one college who had transferred from a full-time college course to work-based learning; they said they would have dropped out of training if the option had not been available. Transfers were mainly because of economic factors or because learners needed more support.

17. Inspectors saw several examples of pre-entry training programmes, which provided either progression routes through to apprenticeships or a better

understanding of a particular area of learning.

One of the colleges visited had a well-planned approach to marketing and providing qualifications in construction that had a positive impact on improving overall and timely success rates. Learners were first attracted to the college at the age of 14 through local community school liaison events. They were encouraged to attend an Introductory Certificate in Basic Construction Skills course as an industry taster. Those who showed an aptitude and desire to progress at the age of 16 were introduced to employers for work experience before they signed up for a full-time level 1 programme. Learners at level 1 benefited from achieving their apprenticeship key skills before progressing to level 2. This gave them more time to concentrate on their specific craft skills and knowledge when they became apprentices. Some advanced apprentices who had first come to the college when they were 14 spoke very warmly about their progression in learning skills over several years and the difference it had made to their lives.

One college visited offered a 10-week course on Saturday mornings, sponsored by a national hospitality employer, for school children to experience working in a commercial training kitchen. The project, called the Junior Chef Academy, occurred at venues around the country. It gave young people who were considering working in the hospitality industry first-hand experience of the type of training they would receive as part of an apprenticeship. The young people who attended learnt about the types of job roles and career paths and the sometimes unsocial working hours that hospitality required, making them less likely to drop out of training later on.

## Initial assessment and the individual learning plan

18. The providers surveyed differed widely in what was included in their initial assessments, as well as in when these activities were carried out. Most of the assessments included literacy, numeracy and sometimes language-screening tests; there was also diagnostic testing of key skills, as well as recording of proxy qualifications and exemptions for key skills. Where providers obtained evidence of proxy qualifications early on, the planning of training for the key skills component was more effective from the start.

19. Most of the providers in the survey had effective initial assessment because they shared results with learners, training staff and employers at the earliest opportunity and ensured that they were used to plan training and support. A small number of providers included dyslexia testing for all their learners, enabling support to be provided where necessary. The best initial assessments

observed took note of relevant previous experience, qualifications and learning to plan learning. Several construction and motor vehicle providers used manual dexterity and occupational aptitude testing to plan skills development.

20. In all five of the vocational areas surveyed, just under half of the providers extended their initial assessment to include an evaluation of each new learner's job role. Checklists referred to as 'skill scans' checked opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace against the requirements of the NVQ, identifying at an early stage the aspects for which evidence would be hardest to find. This not only helped to keep apprentices on target but also made employers more aware of the work that should be available to apprentices to provide evidence for NVQ assessment. This was appreciated by employers, one of whom said:

> 'I've used four different training providers over the past six years for my apprentices. They are the first one to really get to grips with the range of work that we do.'

21. Individual learning plans should form a 'route map' of how an apprentice will get from her or his starting point at the beginning of an apprenticeship to completion of all the framework requirements within a predetermined period of time. Around half the providers surveyed used a standard document and there was little variation in how it was used from one apprentice to the next. The best individual learning plans seen during the survey were documents that developed over time and reflected the circumstances of each apprentice. The plans contributed positively by informing employers and apprentices of key milestones and progress in reaching them, helping to improve timely success rates. Most of these plans started from a common format that reflected the outcomes required for an apprenticeship framework, together with the way that training would be provided and outcomes assessed. They identified the support that would be needed and how it would be provided. They were designed to be 'live' documents used throughout the apprenticeship; useful to the apprentice, staff and employers. One example typified this:

> A retail provider who provided most of the apprenticeship in the workplace with a range of smaller employers had developed an individual learning plan that captured the previous experience of the apprentice, the needs of the employer and the results of initial assessment. This was used to plan individual programmes and to drive training and assessment. The planning of learning was particularly thorough. Apprentices set themselves career objectives, including reflecting on the difference that gaining qualifications would make to them. Employers set three performance objectives for their apprentices, such as setting up a staff newsletter or developing a new procedure for a work task. The rationale for the choice of additional NVQ units was understood by the apprentice and employer. The use and impact of the results of initial assessment were clear in the plans, including extra one-to-one support from assessors, visits by specialist

support tutors and ways of conducting assessment that helped apprentices with dyslexia to succeed. The plans were updated and used regularly during reviews, helping to keep the apprentices on target for timely completion of their apprenticeship. An apprentice who used one of these plans said:

'I keep a copy of my individual learning plan with me and refer to it regularly. It helps me to know where I am and what I still need to do.'

22. Individual learning plans were used in a number of ways that clearly helped to keep apprentices on target to succeed. These included:

■ involving the apprentice in creating the first draft of the individual learning plan, helping their understanding of what it contained and how the contents needed to be updated regularly

■ setting a clear order for working through NVQ units, making it easier for all parties involved in the training to follow and monitor progress

■ where the NVQ had a choice of optional units, choosing these later with the employer to reflect better the job and assessment opportunities

■ using the individual learning plan as the main basis of progress reviews, amending target dates for milestones such as achievement of NVQ units, key skills or technical certificates as necessary

■ having a section in individual learning plans to record how any additional support needs were provided for, keeping everyone involved and preventing support being given in isolation from the main training

■ setting targets that reflected particular types of 'model apprentice', for example, ones who had previous experience or who required additional support

■ several providers that had good information technology resources and made individual learning plans available online, allowing easy access.

## Induction by the employer and the training provider

23. The larger employers surveyed often extended inductions for apprenticeships over several weeks. These employers demonstrated a commitment to training and made new staff aware of progression opportunities. One large hospitality employer provided induction in the workplace through a 'champion' for new apprentices. The champion helped to enthuse new apprentices about the way they would be trained and the benefits of training for future employment within the company. Champions were selected carefully and were seen as playing a key role in advocating the benefits of training. The smaller employers who worked with providers to deliver their training tended to have less structured inductions but routinely involved another employee, often a previous

apprentice, to act as a mentor (sometimes termed a 'buddy') who provided guidance about work and training.

24. Some of the larger employers, particularly those in the retail and hospitality sectors, provided good general training to all their new employees as part of their induction into work so that they were prepared effectively to work with the public at the earliest opportunity. The most strongly motivated were then offered the chance to begin an apprenticeship.

25. The following example in retail demonstrated the elements of an effective induction:

> Learning was planned effectively from the start of each apprentice's employment with a national mobile phone retailer. Particularly good use was made of a five-day company induction. This provided a stimulating introduction to both the employer and the apprenticeship programme. Training completed during induction gave apprentices a good grounding for the work they undertook with managers and assessors on joining their stores. Induction included a key skills development day during which they learnt skills which were directly relevant to their work roles. For example, numeracy skills were developed while calculating mobile phone tariffs.

26. College and work-based learning providers had well-structured inductions that introduced the NVQ and assessment procedures. This included introductory key skills assignments that engaged apprentices with relevant tasks, helping them to see the relevance of key skills. Health and safety and equality of opportunity were covered to at least a satisfactory level. Almost all the apprentices interviewed recalled their induction reasonably well, with just under half believing that it had helped their progress, giving them a good understanding of the components of their programme. Participative learning methods, such as apprentices researching topics and giving presentations to their peers, helped to make inductions interesting and effective. A typical comment from apprentices recalling their introduction to NVQs at induction was:

> 'I'd never done an NVQ before and we learned how to put together our portfolio to collect evidence during the induction. It really helped me focus on collecting evidence from my job and I am very proud of my portfolio and what I have achieved.'

27. The vast majority of inductions observed were conducted on a group rather than individual basis and included activities ranging from 'ice breakers' in small groups to longer, team-building activities. Several providers developed specific induction resources specifically for late starters who missed group induction, so that a shorter but still effective induction could be provided. Several of them provided evidence that this had helped to improve the retention of later starters by comparing recent groups with data from previous years.

28. The extended induction provided by one provider that operated in rural areas with small employers was among the factors that had helped greatly to improve success rates for its hospitality apprentices.

> All apprentices had a four-month induction period during which they completed specific tasks. This allowed assessors to determine the level at which the apprentices were working and the appropriate job role for them, helping to match employers and jobs to apprentices. The induction enabled apprentices to understand the requirements of the NVQ and the commitment required in order to achieve a full apprenticeship framework in hospitality.

## On- and off-the-job training

29. The apprenticeships observed in the survey involved a mixture of on- and off-the-job training and assessment.[4] The proportion varied, depending on how the training was provided. Employers conducting their own training in retail and hospitality had a higher proportion of on-the-job training and assessment. In care, construction, hospitality and motor vehicle, off-the-job training was usually involved, allowing groups of learners to have specialist input.

30. Training by the large retail and hospitality employers visited was well-structured and provided effectively. One national hospitality employer devised a six-month programme detailing the activities to be completed each week. Professionally designed resources supported training well, no matter how few or how many apprentices were at a particular workplace. Experienced staff acted as mentors to learners and were available in different work areas and for different shift patterns. Inspectors saw this approach several times during the survey. It had improved previously poor success rates when the responsibility for training was left to subcontractors.

> Good training at a national supermarket was achieved through excellent resources and specialist training. Materials used throughout the apprenticeship programme were of a very high standard. They had been developed by training specialists to meet the specific requirements of the programme, such as teamworking or safe food-handling. They were checked to ensure that they reflected apprentices' literacy levels. Designers involved in the development of training materials had a good understanding of the needs of the apprentice and of the programme.

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[4] As the name suggests, off-the-job training is the training done on behalf of employers, usually away from their premises. It involves theory and practical training, testing and varying amounts of assessment. Although it usually takes place on the premises of the provider, on-the-job training sometimes includes online learning in the workplace or at home, and visits from the staff of the provider to the employer.

> Subject experts collaborated closely with them to ensure that the content was interesting, current and reflected the key values of the employer, such as improving the quality of service. Off-the-job training sessions were provided by highly experienced trainers including subject experts who provided interesting and enjoyable sessions in specialist areas such as bakery, fish and meat.

31. The arrangements for training seen in the survey varied but worked well.

   ■ It was the norm in motor vehicle apprenticeships to use block-release training in well-resourced venues, often involving residential accommodation. These concentrated blocks of training quickly gave apprentices the skills that made them productive in the workplace.

   ■ Many of the colleges and work-based learning providers used a system of day-release where apprentices attended one day each week over a 36-week year. Some of the work-based learning providers operated the same system throughout a 50-week year. Variations included attendance every two weeks. Provision was highly structured and the order of the training was discussed with the employers in order to make effective links between the training provided on- and off-the-job.

   ■ A workshop model for theory training was commonly used by retail and some care providers. This was popular with employers who found it difficult to provide regular cover on a weekly basis. A small number of the providers in the sample were very flexible and operated workshops in the evenings and at weekends to fit the working patterns of their apprentices.

32. Where the models included both on- and off-the-job training, the two were linked so that they complemented each other. Providing off-the-job training in a uniform way which does not take sufficient account of the differences in the apprentices' work settings can contribute to underperformance. The providers in the survey had worked extremely hard to become engaged with their employers, as was evident from a typical employer's comment:

   > 'I was really surprised when a manager from the provider came to see me and asked how could they improve their training? I was even more surprised when they switched the order of their delivery so that my employees could actually carry out jobs such as changing tyres that made them financially productive for me at an earlier stage in their apprenticeship.'

33. Having a flexible off-the-job training programme, with several possible starting points so that non-summer starters were not disadvantaged was the model that most of the providers were working towards. However, the majority of apprentices seen in the survey started training during the summer. Although several of the providers operated flexibly, they felt that later starters were often disadvantaged and less likely to succeed. Most tried to start another group to

overcome this. This was less of a problem where employers provided their own training, particularly in hospitality and retail, as programmes were tailored to individuals rather than groups of apprentices. One college had a fixed starting point each September, not taking late starters beyond a certain point. At first, this seemed harsh and inflexible, in not meeting the needs of late starters. However, it has been a key factor in helping the college to raise both its overall and timely success rates and to improve the reputation of the college with employers for the quality of its training. Completely changing delivery models can improve performance dramatically:

> One national hospitality employer improved both its overall and timely success rates in a single year from historically low rates to above the national average. The key factor in raising success rates had been changing the model for providing the training, bringing it 'in-house' and no longer using a poorly performing provider. The employer fully engaged managers in training, improved the support for apprentices, improved training for key skills and invested significantly in both electronic and traditional paper-based learning resources to be used in the workplace. These specifically reflected the needs of the company and the hospitality industry.

## Practical and theory training

34. All the apprentices in the survey gained elements of practical and theory training at work by virtue of doing their jobs. The better performance of providers in the survey was influenced by linking this well to the requirements of the NVQ, key skills and technical certificates. The larger employers had in-house training programmes in which their apprentices were engaged from an early stage. Aspects of health and safety, contextualised to the area of learning, were covered early in all five areas in the survey. The smaller employers who were interviewed during the survey tended to identify a member of staff to lead on training. She or he liaised with the staff of the provider to coach the apprentice in developing practical skills. Almost all the employers interviewed, regardless of their size, used manufacturers working in the vocational areas to provide an element of specialist training that provided breadth of knowledge beyond the needs of the NVQ.

35. Providers in the survey put a lot of effort into recruiting trainers who were skilled and experienced staff from the industry. This gave them credibility with learners and employers as they had knowledge of current working practices in industry. This was seen across all five areas in the survey and with all types of provider. It was particularly evident in hospitality and remarked upon by several employers. All the providers surveyed demonstrated a commitment to the continuing professional development of their staff, including programmes to ensure that their staff gained teaching qualifications. The training staff who

were interviewed kept themselves up-to-date in their area of learning, often undertaking placements with employers or manufacturers.

36. Several examples of good training were seen during survey visits or through examining resources and talking to apprentices. Some of these involved considerable investment in technology while others cost little to develop. The following is a summary of factors seen during the survey that had a positive impact on developing apprentices' skills and knowledge and helping them to pass their assessments and external tests:

- staff having strong vocational backgrounds that allowed them to engage with their apprentices and made teaching relevant to the five areas surveyed

- planning provision for the whole apprenticeship and sharing planning with employers to enable them to support learning through on-the-job activities

- providing practical and theory training in teams, to make the best use of specialist practical skills and knowledge of staff

- teaching in the workplace or in specialist accommodation for care, catering, construction and motor vehicle

- developing materials at a suitable level for apprentices so that they were used outside taught sessions (for care, catering and retail employers these were used in the workplace by mentors with the right vocational backgrounds)

- encouraging questions and involving learners in discussions by sharing their experiences in the workplace

- using different methods of checking learning so that no-one got left behind

- training staff to make the best use of technology and having 'champions' who showed others how it can improve teaching

- sharing existing materials and developing online learning materials to which staff could have access and that apprentices could use in work or at home

- in retail and care, offering 'out of hours' services, such as Saturday sessions on key skills and evening sessions on building a portfolio

- in all areas, offering online or paper testing supported by revision activities so that apprentices could choose what suited them best

- checking the planning of learning and observing teaching to share best practice.

37. Good use was made of specialist workshops to provide theory training:

> Retail apprentices attended a well-planned and interesting workshop that was available on a monthly rota to prepare them for their technical certificates. One member of staff specialised in teaching this area and was extremely knowledgeable. The apprentices enjoyed the workshop and

they spoke highly of both the content and the way the training was provided. It allowed apprentices to exchange experiences of retail with their different employers. The chance to take mock examinations as part of the workshop prepared them well and success rates for technical certificates were consistently very high. A typical comment from one of several apprentices who attended the workshop was:

'Going to the workshop was brilliant. The teaching was really interesting and I was able to share my own experience with others who work in different types of retail to me. I wish we had a workshop like this every week!'

38. One college had involved employers in improving off-the-job training in construction:

The construction section of one college had engaged its employers in improving training. Employer members of the college's sector advisory group came in on training days and observed teaching and learning in practice. Six employers had completed observations of theory and practical lessons in the last year. Using the college's system, they recorded their views on the context of the activity; the environment and equipment; and whether learners were being taught to current industry standards and developing skills relevant to industry needs and requirements. Employers had improved their understanding of the technical certificate, the training and assessment for which was provided by the college. A typical comment from the employers who observed training was: 'The college is delivering training that matches the standards we expect to see in industry.'

39. Although there were examples of expensive resources, other examples of inexpensive resources helped good teaching:

A particularly well-planned teaching session in motor vehicle engineering used simply produced and inexpensive resources to provide apprentices with an interactive and stimulating session, consolidating their understanding of an important topic. The session covered power train layouts for motor vehicles, allowing apprentices to explore the various layout options. Following an overview at the start of the session about what they were expected to learn, the apprentices were asked to record, on note pads, two things that they already knew and two things that they wanted to know. These were displayed and served as a checklist to ensure that all learning needs were met.

The tutor then presented the apprentices with a number of paper cut-outs of different vehicle drive-train components. Apprentices organised themselves into groups. They divided the components among themselves,

identified what they were, where they fitted and what their job was. Using a wall covered in brown paper as a blank canvas, they stuck the components onto the wall, creating a large collage showing how vehicle power trains can be configured. This enabled the apprentices to apply the knowledge they had gained from their previous experiences. The session encouraged constructive discussion and the apprentices clearly enjoyed this way of learning. All the apprentices discussed the resulting collages, reinforcing their knowledge and understanding. During the activities they were asked to write any questions they had on a 'questions park' board. The tutor used this as a final activity to ensure that all the points raised were answered fully, helping to meet the needs of the group and individuals. A typical comment from one of the apprentices in the session was: 'I learned so much in the session and the time flew by. It worked really well and we all really enjoyed it.'

40. Several examples were seen of mentors supporting learning in the workplace:

Care learners were supported on the job by mentors in the rooms where they worked. Mentors were qualified, experienced staff who had been through the apprenticeship programmes themselves and had a good understanding of the needs of apprentices. Mentors helped them to gain work-based skills and knowledge through interesting discussions based around their work and the completion of training materials. Time was set aside for the mentor and apprentice to work together, discussing the apprentice's weekly planning sheet and any issues related to the training. Provider's staff supported mentors by having regular mentor meetings and by visiting the mentors in their workplaces. A typical comment from one of the care apprentices was: 'Our training is fun and interesting. There is always someone around to help explain anything we are unsure of at work.'

41. Checking what learning has taken place during and at the end of a teaching session usually involves asking individuals questions and may not involve everyone in a group. Several ways of checking group learning were seen which worked well:

Motor vehicle apprentices at one college really enjoyed the different approach that had been developed to check their learning, using an interactive version of the television quiz programme 'Blockbusters'. First, learners were divided into two teams and given electronic wireless 'voting' pads with four buttons that corresponded to letters 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D'. On a large screen controlled by the tutor, a series of different single capital letters were displayed in cells that made up a grid, a little like a chessboard. The idea was for each team to select letters and then answer questions linked to each letter in order to make a connection of joined 'letter cells' across the board. When a question was answered wrongly the opposing team got the chance to try and make its connection across the

board or to select cells in order to block the progress of the opposing team. Each letter was linked to a question with four possible answers (A to D). Apprentices in each team conferred and selected their agreed answer. If answered correctly, the cell became their colour and another question was asked; incorrect answers made the cell the colour of the opposing team and they took control of the questions. Tutors listened to apprentices' discussions to select answers and asked further questions if it helped their understanding. An apprentice in one of the sessions said: 'It's a brilliant way to check what we have understood. We all enjoy the game and it helps us remember the key facts in a really fun way.'

42. Technology was used well in teaching by motor vehicle employers and providers:

The motor vehicle section of a college used simulations effectively to extend opportunities for practical learning. The college had both purchased and produced its own test rigs (large pieces of apparatus that can be programmed to simulate problems which apprentices must identify and correct) and virtual simulations (a computer program) so that apprentices could experience a range of technical problems. The problems were ones which would otherwise be difficult to replicate in a practical setting, as there would need to be a large stock of faulty vehicles. Apprentices enjoyed the challenge and stimulation of trying to solve problems. The simulations extended their knowledge and experience, helping to develop skills which could be applied in the workplace.

## Key skills

43. One of the main contributory factors to poor national overall and timely success rates in recent years has been the failure to get to grips with training for and assessing key skills. These were often planned to be completed once the NVQ was finished. In contrast, all the providers in the survey ensured good, timely key skills training. They introduced key skills at induction and made them interesting and relevant to the areas of learning by placing the NVQ and key skills training together. This avoided unnecessary duplication. The apprentices interviewed were usually very complimentary about their key skills training and could see the benefits. Several of the large employers subcontracted the provision of key skills training to carefully chosen providers who worked with the employers to ensure that the skills were taught in a relevant way.

44. Good resource materials were seen in the vast majority of visits, including employers' handbooks that explained the role of the employers. Providers' staff referred to the handbooks during their visits to the workplace. About half the employers interviewed were supportive of key skills training and could give examples of their positive impact at work. Several had previously been sceptical about key skills but now supported apprentices by allowing them time at work

to apply them. There were many good examples of assignments researching real scenarios and coming up with ideas that employers had implemented, sometimes with business benefits, such as improving a service.

45. Many of the staff interviewed had gained key skills qualifications themselves in order to understand better the potential problems that their apprentices might encounter. This experience enabled them to support apprentices better, particularly with the application of number. Staff referred their apprentices to useful websites, again in particular for the application of number. Many apprentices preferred to use these freely available web-based support materials as an alternative to text books and handouts and they used them from work and at home.

46. Inspectors saw some particularly good teaching of key skills during the survey. A common feature of such teaching was its vocational relevance. Discussions held by inspectors during two college visits showed how changes in the approach taken by vocational staff, or by team-teaching between vocational and academic staff, had altered the views of apprentices about key skills and improved their pass rates. Before this, when the application of number was taught as an academic subject, attendance had been poor and examination pass rates had been low.

47. The following examples illustrate how a further two colleges had integrated key skills teaching into the vocational area:

> One college had integrated key skills particularly well into motor vehicle theory training. The apprentices understood, appreciated and enjoyed the contextualisation. They also understood the importance of key skills both in achieving their apprenticeship frameworks and in their working lives. A video was used very well to show complex work on car engine cylinder heads. Staff checked various free video-hosting websites to find video clips that apprentices enjoyed seeing and built lesson plans around them.
>
> The example seen involved the apprentices in measuring a real cylinder head in their theory room, replicating instructions shown on an American video and applying their findings to their own situations. They converted American imperial measurements to metric and checked calculations using feeler gauges. The apprentices were confident to perform the tasks and gave a commentary as they did so in front of their class. One of the learners said: 'I could never have stood up and made those kinds of intricate measurements in front of people a year ago but I know what I am doing and enjoy showing that I'm getting it right.'

> A college integrated key skills into hospitality training particularly well. The culmination of much of the key skills work was a competition where the apprentices researched and produced their own menu within a tight

budget. All the apprentices did very well; they approached the task with enthusiasm and imagination, and completed it. They were able to use communication, application of number and information technology particularly well. Employers involved themselves in the practice preparations of the menu and were very supportive of their apprentices at work. It helped them to see the relevance of key skills to the hospitality industry.

The advanced apprenticeship project involved using software that explored nutritional values of food alongside sustainability, with the concept of 'food foraging' reducing the carbon footprint of menus where food was not sourced locally. The menus and dishes produced were of a very high restaurant standard and extended learning in both hospitality and key skills. There was a clear focus on improving apprentices' confidence and employability skills. Employers judged the final competition and were supportive of the college and of the way in which key skills training was being provided.

48. Many of the care apprentices struggled to achieve key skills in the application of number. One provider's approach had worked well in overcoming this:

A set of 'maths cards' explored numeracy in the context of children's care, reinforcing the importance of understanding and using numbers in the workplace. Apprentices attended key skills workshops that started with a self-assessment of each apprentice's confidence in dealing with different aspects of numeracy, such as handling money, measurements and understanding data. Apprentices worked in pairs or small groups and answered 28 questions that related specifically to the job of a children's care worker. For example, some questions related to staffing arrangements, costs of children's outings, food and refreshments, wastage and children's health. The questions were highly effective at engaging apprentices, especially those who joined the programmes with low qualifications or with an aversion to using numbers. One apprentice had used the cards to create her own number games with children in her nursery. Overall, this approach had been highly successful at breaking down barriers related to learning numeracy and, over the past two years, had led to improved achievement in key skills.

49. One positive change for apprentices had been the availability of online testing in the past two to three years for their external examinations. The apprentices said that they enjoyed taking online tests. The instant feedback on their performance was motivating, and helped to identify the areas they needed to work on if they failed. Apprentices were positive about the preparation they received from the providers, with focused revision and mock testing being particularly useful. The providers in the survey all said that online testing had

helped to increase the number of apprentices passing tests on their first attempt. Apprentices found the online questions easier to understand and could take examinations when they were ready to do so, rather than having to wait for an examination date. Retakes of examinations were much quicker and the vast majority of apprentices interviewed passed their key skills examinations at the first or second attempt. Although many apprentices are exempt from taking key skills tests because they have proxy GCSE qualifications, most completed key skills portfolios enthusiastically and a minority took higher-level qualifications.

## Support

50. Improvements in support were a main contributory factor in improving success rates for apprentices in the areas sampled who, because of their additional learning needs, might otherwise have struggled to complete written work. In addition, some apprentices with personal difficulties would have dropped out of training if they had not received support. Learning support was most commonly seen for apprentices with literacy and numeracy difficulties. Where data were available in the providers surveyed, it showed that apprentices with additional learning needs who received support performed as well as or better than those without such needs. Two thirds of the providers in the survey had a considerable number of learners (10% or above) who needed support and could show how it was being given. However, it was not always recorded on or part of individual learning plans.

51. During the survey, inspectors explored the impact of support by talking to apprentices who received it. Many of the apprentices were initially wary of taking qualifications because of their low levels of literacy and numeracy. They talked about being frightened of writing and taking any form of test. Many apprentices felt that the learning support they received was a major factor in helping them succeed with key skills and technical certificate tests. Most of the providers visited felt, from their experience, that the take-up of learning support improved if it was offered in the first few weeks of a programme. Late offers of support were not always welcomed by apprentices who otherwise 'made do'. Support was not taken up as much if the apprentices had to have the support at lunchtimes or beyond their training day.

52. There were many good examples of support being given within group theory sessions, by apprentices' attendance at support workshops or through one-to-one teaching, both on- and off-the-job. Assessors used dictaphones well to capture authentic evidence for apprentices who had dyslexia, such as dealing with customers in shops or answering questions during assessment. They also provided assessment evidence for apprentices who were learning English as an additional language. Most of the providers visited could give examples of helping apprentices with dyslexia by, for example, using coloured overlays over text and particular fonts for printing. Not all the support offered was monitored for its effectiveness. For example, where support was given to groups of

apprentices in theory sessions, many who were not identified as being at pre-entry level made better progress and could expand on many positive features of their improved progress, but this was not recorded.

53. Several apprentices spoke positively about the support they received in groups:

> A group of six carpentry advanced apprentices who had all recently qualified with a work-based learning provider had received learning support in their classes from the start of their training. The same learning support tutor had worked with them in class from the beginning of their apprenticeship. Although she was not a construction specialist, she liaised with construction staff and became very knowledgeable about different trades. The apprentices gave examples of how their confidence and desire to succeed grew with the support, raising their aspirations to learn. A typical comment from one of the apprentices was: 'I was a failure at school. My teachers had given up on me and never expected me to amount to much. I am so proud to have passed so many qualifications and proved them wrong.'

54. The providers visited were also able to give examples of personal support for apprentices who had problems with housing, and alcohol and drugs misuse, as well as mental and physical health problems. One training provider moved apprentices from small, less busy retail shops to larger ones as their confidence improved. Providers had good links with agencies to make necessary referrals and many had specialist support such as counselling. Three of the providers achieved high success rates, despite the fact that one in four of their apprentices had additional support needs.

## Assessment and the engagement of employers

55. Historically, inspection reports have often cited a lack of work-based assessment as the main cause of poor overall and timely success rates in the five areas surveyed. Engaging employers successfully in training and assessing apprentices has been a vital factor in improving success rates. The providers in the survey had all improved the amount of evidence gathered from the workplace by working with their employers. For the large retail and hospitality employers, most assessment evidence came from the workplace and the challenge had been to engage their own managers in promoting training and assessment.

56. The construction sector has been particularly successful in promoting work-based assessment and has made considerable advances in the amount and quality of evidence generated over the past six years. For the general construction providers in the survey, the recession has had an impact on the amount and range of work available, restricting opportunities for work-based assessment. Apprenticeship officers for the major construction provider linked

effectively with apprentices' employers, helping to coordinate the on- and off-the-job training. They established an 'apprenticeship matching service', helping apprentices who had lost their placements by matching them with an alternative employer and therefore enabling them to complete their qualification. Two examples of involving construction employers in assessment are given below:

> A national construction provider ensured that every apprentice had a trained work-based recorder within the workplace. They were employed to enable evidence from naturally occurring activities to be collected and used in portfolios of evidence. Subcontractors were required contractually to complete a minimum of one site-based assessment visit for each apprentice to assist further in collecting the evidence needed to prove competence. Provider apprenticeship officers liaised well with employers, visiting workplaces to assist apprentices by collecting photographic evidence and testimonials from work-based recorders.

> One work-based learning provider facilitated the networking of their small construction employers through 'builders' breakfast' meetings. Construction staff were aware that these types of meetings were used successfully by builders' merchants to promote the sales of products. The breakfasts were well-attended and used to tell employers about the training available and the part that they could play in it. In a time of recession, many small builders were taking any work available, often with the result that the range of assessment opportunities for their apprentices had narrowed. The breakfasts helped to create opportunities for apprentices with other employers who had work coming up with the right assessment opportunities. Typically, an apprentice spent a day or two with another employer when there was less work with her or his own employer.

One of the small construction employers said:

> 'Giving another apprentice the chance to work on my site is no big deal. It's my chance to give something back to the industry. I'd like to think that if I was starting again, a builder out there would do the same for me.'

57. Several examples were seen of providers making adaptations to engage employers in providing assessment opportunities, as in this example in retail:

> Employers spoke highly of the emphasis placed on meeting their needs. In one example, where assessments were required to be carried out during night shifts, and apprentices were learning English as an additional language, a night shift assessor was employed and work books were translated into Polish.

58. During the survey, the common features of the best practice in engaging employers in assessment included:

■ providing them with clear written guidance on apprenticeship frameworks

■ sharing off-the-job training schedules with employers to help them plan better to develop the employability skills of their apprentices

■ altering aspects of provision or assessment to meet the needs of employers

■ having regular pre-arranged visits to the workplace by provider's staff

■ having continuity of staffing in the provider, working with an apprentice and the employer to help to build strong working relationships

■ flexibility from the provider's staff in taking advantage of assessment opportunities in the workplace at short notice

■ service-level agreements between the provider and the employer, with a requirement that the employer supported the apprentices

■ establishing employer forums to encourage and support communication about training.

59. Two very different examples of increasing the amount of evidence from the workplace are given below:

One retail provider recruited assessors who matched a profile agreed with the employer. For example, an American assessor was posted at a US bank in the City of London and an assessor with 30 years' experience of airline personnel was based at Terminal 5, Heathrow airport. Assessors were permanently based at an employer's premises for the duration of each contract and quickly built good working relationships with them. The assessor's attention was firmly focused on the needs of the apprentices and not distracted by the demands of other employers; no time was wasted travelling from site to site. Assessors were able to make the best use of observation and witness testimonies, especially when unexpected work demands arose for apprentices. They were also well-placed to manage apprentices on different shift patterns. The result of this was fast achievement for apprentices who often completed full apprenticeship frameworks within three to six months.

One college that provided motor vehicle training successfully improved understanding of NVQ assessment requirements by rewriting training-related paperwork into more accessible language. Many apprentices and employers found the language used in NVQ standards particularly difficult to understand. The assessment standards had been broken down into key

practical tasks that needed to be carried out. Employers found the amended paperwork easier to use with their apprentices when planning and recording evidence of assessment. Together with good guidance on writing witness testimonies for employers this helped to improve both the quantity and quality of workplace evidence for assessment.

The following is typical of the comments made by employers:

'The way we work with the college has improved as a result of them changing the paperwork. I can now see the jobs that my apprentice needs to complete as I understand the NVQ much better. I now look out for the jobs that he needs evidence for to come into the workshop, so I can keep an eye on his work and give him witness testimonies.'

60. Senior managers in the work-based learning providers surveyed often took the lead in engaging employers by paying annual visits, sending newsletters and seeking views on how to improve their service to them. Several colleges had developed a work-based unit to carry out a similar role. Some particularly good examples of the engagement of employers in training were seen in the large retail and hospitality employers surveyed. This involved promoting the benefits of training staff and getting the managers to commit to training and assessment.

## Progress reviews and setting targets

61. A key factor in increasing timely success rates was regular and frequent contact between the staff of the provider and the employers. This focused on setting targets to provide work-based evidence to make sure that apprentices made progress against their individual learning plan. Where this was not done well, apprentices might still complete their apprenticeship framework but overrun the planned time for them to do so.

### Different types of review

62. In the provision visited, reviews were of two kinds. Both types of review occurred in the workplace and involved the apprentice, the training provider and the employer.

- Target-setting reviews occurred every time an assessor visited the workplace (for many of the providers in the survey, this varied between weekly and monthly). These reviewed short-term targets, linked to assessment, which were contributing to meeting the longer-term targets of the individual learning plan. The reviews gave clear guidance to the learner and employer, providing evidence for assessment.

- Contractual monitoring reviews occurred at least every 12 weeks. These had a focus on progress, over a longer period, but also checked the welfare of the apprentice, while monitoring and reinforcing health and safety and

equality of opportunity.

Both types of review recorded discussions and updated the individual learning plan, usually using the provider's paperwork.

63. The quality of both types of review was extremely variable in the survey. Although useful discussions took place, they were not always captured well on the review documentation. The following distils the key points of best practice from the reviews seen in the survey:

- ensuring that the paperwork used was suitable and had sufficient space and flexibility to capture discussions and targets

- training the staff who would conduct reviews so that they understood their purpose fully

- covering the purpose and value of reviews at induction for apprentices and employers

- updating individual learning plans so that everyone was aware of changes to planned completion dates

- booking progress reviews in advance to ensure that all parties who should be involved could be involved (closer to the time of the review, using phone calls, texts, emails or postcards to remind apprentices and employers of review meetings)

- holding reviews more frequently for apprentices who needed learning or additional support (and checking the effectiveness in the reviews)

- scheduling time in the visit to complete review activities

- having a reporting structure, so that monitoring reviews covered the full performance of the apprentice at the provider. This enabled a well-informed review to take place and kept the employer informed of all progress

- in construction, assigning each apprentice an apprenticeship officer who was responsible for completing review documentation and providing support

- giving apprentices an overview of how far they had progressed through the apprenticeship framework, using a rough percentage; otherwise, when learners had completed parts of several units, they often felt that their progress was slower than it actually was

- updating employers on the telephone or by email if they missed a review.

64. One particularly good example of review paperwork was seen in a retail provider:

> Training paperwork had been designed extremely well to capture discussions and the targets set. Every time an assessor visited an apprentice, often fortnightly, a single page 'learner assessment review' was completed. This showed exactly where apprentices were on all aspects of their apprenticeship framework, including an overall percentage progress mark. It judged this progress against statements that gave details if an apprentice was in danger of slipping behind target, as well as assessing the contribution of the apprentice to her or his training. Clear targets were set for the next visit and all parties involved in the training were aware of them. Apprentices referred to the document regularly, sometimes daily. A more lengthy and detailed summary of an apprentice's progress was completed every three months during formal monitoring reviews, which included detailed contributions from the employer. A typical comment from one of the provider's apprentices was: 'I keep my assessment review pinned up next to my desk. I look at it every time I have a spare minute. I love the overall percentage progress mark. It makes me focus and I get a real buzz from seeing the figure rise every two weeks when my assessor visits.'

**Setting targets for learners**

65. The key to setting targets that apprentices referred to when completing tasks was agreeing them clearly with the apprentice, not just telling them what needed to be done. Apprentices were motivated by larger targets being broken down into smaller steps. Many of the apprentices interviewed during the survey kept some form of training diary, where they crossed off items as they completed them. In all the areas in the survey, it was common to see a monthly action sheet in staff rooms. This helped others who might play some role in training to identify areas where they could help, such as looking out for a particular job to come into a workshop or to occur on a building site.

66. Some of the really successful assessors interviewed ensured that their apprentices did not work on too many units at once, as it could contribute to slowing progress and reducing the focus. Apprentices told inspectors how they felt a sense of achievement in 'closing down' a unit since this was a very visible indicator of progress. The successful assessors also ensured that key staff of the employer knew what the apprentice needed to do before the assessor's next visit in order to support them. This was often no more than a quick conversation. Another feature emerging regularly was that apprentices were confident to contact their assessor between visits to check something they were unsure about. This involved mobile phones, texts and emails, often outside working hours.

**Using data to manage assessors effectively**

67. The vast majority of the providers visited where there were high timely success rates used management information systems effectively to monitor and manage apprentices' progress. Reports were generated regularly, between weekly and monthly, for managers to review assessors' productivity and progress made by apprentices. Progress reports showed what the apprentices had achieved to date, what had been achieved that month and what was still to be completed. Training managers usually met their individual assessors each month to review targets. Progress was summarised on spreadsheets. A few of them reflected progress against a traffic light system: green indicating apprentices making good progress; orange for adequate progress; and red for those falling behind and in danger of not completing on time. This visual approach clearly showed when things were going well or in danger of going wrong. Where underperformance was identified, action was taken, especially in the last few months of planned training. Action included arranging extra support, assessments or training. This is an example from care:

> In a care provider with a strong focus on timely completion, apprentices who were close to completing their apprenticeship framework were identified on a board in the main centre. Assessors and managers monitored them closely to ensure that they completed successfully. When apprentices had 12 weeks left on the programme, they were sent a reminder letter which acted as a motivator to complete. These measures helped to close the gap between timely and overall success rates. A typical comment from one of the apprentices was: 'I feel in control of my training and assessment because of the support that I get from my assessor. I should finish several weeks early.'

68. The benefits of collecting and using data in this way were that:

- assessors saw exactly what every apprentice had achieved to date and what was left to be completed

- assessors knew if an apprentice was ahead or behind her or his target completion date

- assessors prioritised apprentices who were due to complete in a quarter and ensured that the required support was in place

- possible concerns were highlighted in a timely manner and were tackled before they became insoluble

- the performance of each assessor and employer was easily seen and managed.

## Notes

Between October 2009 and January 2010, inspectors visited 39 providers to identify the key features of successful provision in three currently underperforming vocational areas: hospitality, motor vehicle and retail; and two historically underperforming areas that have improved to the national average in recent years: care and construction. The providers visited had either been judged to be good or outstanding for their overall effectiveness at their last inspection or had a recent history of sustained improvement in success rates. The sample included traditional work-based learning providers, seven colleges of further education, a voluntary sector organisation, a consortia of providers and several large employers who managed their own training contracts. The term 'provider' is used as a generic one for the sample unless findings refer to a particular type of provider. In two cases, inspectors looked at more than one area of learning. Hospitality was inspected in eight providers, motor vehicle in nine, retail in nine, care in seven and construction in nine providers.

Inspectors held discussions with representatives from the then Learning and Skills Council, the Apprenticeship Service and sector skills councils to inform the survey. Inspectors observed theory, key skills and practical training, as well as assessments and reviews in the workplace. They sampled apprentices' portfolios of evidence, scrutinised records held on apprentices and documents related to the provision of programmes. They interviewed a range of staff, including managers, lecturers, assessors, recruitment and support staff. Visits were made to head offices of national employers and individual workplaces such as building sites, care homes, garages, restaurants and shops. Employers' staff were interviewed during visits or by telephone and email. Just over 350 learners were interviewed, either individually or in small groups.

## Further information

### Publications by Ofsted

*The impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment: a review to follow up the 2007/08 survey* (090033), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090033.

*Implementation of 14–19 reforms, including the introduction of diplomas* (080267), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080267.

*Improving progression to sustainable unsupported employment: a review of strategies developed by Workstep providers* (080258), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080258.

*Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why* (090236), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090236.

*Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning* (100112), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100112

Inspection reports of work-based learning provision can be found in 'Inspection reports' at: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

## Websites

Information on 14 to 19 reform can be found at:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/.

Information on apprenticeships can be found at:
www.apprenticeships.org.uk/.
http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/educationandlearning/adultlearning/trainingandworkplacelearning/dg_4001327

Information on key skills can be found at:
www.qcda.gov.uk/6444.aspx

Information on functional skills can be found at:
http://www.fssupport.org/.
http://www.qcda.gov.uk/6062.aspx.

# Annex A: Providers visited for this survey

Age Concern England Training
British Gas Services Ltd
Bromley College of Further and Higher Education
CITB – Constructional Skills (North West)
Compass Group UK & Ireland
Crown College*
Eden Training*
Hawk Management (UK) Ltd
Hospitality Training Partnership
JTL
Kwik-Fit (GB) Ltd
Jaguar Cars Ltd & Land Rover
Mid-Kent College of Higher and Further Education
NG Bailey
North Lancs Training Group
Northampton College
Orient Gold Limited
Phones 4 U Limited
Prospects College*
Puffins Training Limited
Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd
Smart Training and Recruitment Ltd
South Devon College
Tesco Stores Limited
The Nova Partnership
The Training and Learning Company
Thurrock and Basildon College*
Total People Ltd
Toyota (GB) PLC
Training 2000 Ltd
Training Plus Merseyside Ltd
Ultra Training
Valley Forge (UK) Ltd
Vocational Training Services*
VT Plus
Warwickshire College
Weir Training Ltd
Westminster Kingsway College
Whitbread plc

* These providers are individual members of the Nova Partnership, a consortium of providers in Essex.

# Annex B: Key steps in training an apprentice

This provides an overview of work-based learning derived from the findings of the survey visits. It is also available as a flow chart at this link:
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090225

## Selection and recruitment

Directly by employer/training provider; preset entry requirements may be used to screen entrants; may involve selection interviews, work tasters and trial periods. Progression from school link/Young Apprenticeship courses for 14–16-year-olds is increasingly common.

## Initial assessment

Ascertains level of the apprentice on entry, identifies her or his potential to succeed with or without support, suitable level of programme and support needs. Examines job role to link to NVQ requirements, previous experience and qualifications; may include occupational aptitude testing.

## Induction by the employer and the training provider

The individual programme covers: employment rights and responsibilities; content and delivery of the training programme; health and safety; equality and diversity; safeguarding; assessment; internal verification; and appeals; often more than an initial block of induction.

## Appropriate programme chosen – individual learning plan drawn up

An individual learning plan sets out how the apprenticeship framework will be achieved for each apprentice. It sets target dates for each NVQ unit, key skills, technical certificates and achievement of the overall framework. It helps to determine timely success; includes delivery and assessment methods, support, and additional qualifications/training opportunities. This is a 'live' document, used and updated continually throughout training so that everyone involved in training the apprentice understands her or his role.

### On-the-job training and assessment

Work for employer generates assessment evidence; formal and informal training; placements within and outside the company to obtain experience and assessment evidence; mentoring by colleagues; trade shows, visits, competitions, and manufacturer training. May include learning support visits. Work-based assessment may involve staff from the provider and/or employer as assessors; extra evidence by

witness testimonies and work products.

**Off-the-job training and assessment**

Includes teaching of theory, key skills and sometimes practical training, with assessment and preparation for external testing. May include industry visits, competitions, and manufacturer training. May include regular day release, block release, special training days/workshops, or may all be delivered on employer's premises. May include learning support individually or in groups. Internal verification helps to assure the quality of assessment, both on- and off-the-job.

**Reviews of each apprentice's progress and targets set**

Reviews establish clear links between on- and off-the-job training; involve the apprentice, training provider and employer; set and review targets against the individual learning plan, updating it as necessary. Targets are set and broken down into achievable 'steps' in an action plan that may require action by the employer and training provider to support the apprentice. Targets keep the apprentice on track to achieve, with action taken to tackle issues, provide opportunities for assessment and review support arrangements. Target-setting occurs regularly, between weekly and monthly. At the 12-weekly contractual monitoring reviews, the focus is still on progress but also on the welfare of the apprentice, monitoring her or his health and safety and equality of opportunity. The reviews should include the apprentice, the employer and provider staff and be carried out in private in the workplace. Before the apprentice completes the individual learning plan, opportunities for any further higher-level training or advances in employment are considered.