

Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning

This report presents some of the common factors that have led to high performance in the work of 12 providers of work-based learning. It outlines the key challenges they faced on the journey to becoming outstanding and explains the ways in which they are seeking to sustain excellence. It includes profiles of the providers and leaders' and managers' views of the reasons for their success.

Age group: Post-16

Published: July 2010

Reference no: 100112

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100112

© Crown copyright 2010



Contents

Foreword by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector	4
The national picture	6
Summary of the characteristics of outstanding providers	10
Achieving excellence	12
Sustaining excellence	24
Provider profiles	29
Andrew Collinge Training	29
Aspire Training Team	32
British Gas Energy Academy	35
Davidson Training UK	37
Gateshead College	41
Hospitality Training Partnership	43
Intraining	46
Skillnet	49
Training Services 2000	52
Warwickshire College	55
Zenos	58
5E	62
Notes	65
Further information	65
Publications by Ofsted	65
Other publications	66
Websites	66

Foreword by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

The 12 outstanding providers of work-based learning featured in this report achieve excellent results and work in exemplary ways with young people and adults, many of whom were strangers to educational success when they began their programmes. Some of these providers are recognised as regional or national centres of excellence and competition for places on their programmes is fierce. Others are less well-known; they have to seek out learners actively in whom they might see potential. Whatever the starting point, successful outcomes are not guaranteed.

No standard description fits outstanding providers of work-based learning or their journeys to excellence. The providers described here have achieved their status as 'outstanding' through different routes and by developing different models of providing training and assessment. Nevertheless, they have faced similar challenges and, on closer analysis, some shared traits emerge. The report analyses some of the key factors that have led to high success rates and illustrates them with practical examples.

From the perspective of an individual provider, it is not easy to draw up a well-researched framework for improvement. Where available, national data on success rates provide a key comparative measure of performance and can inform target-setting. But to go beyond this in setting priorities for improvement, managers sometimes find themselves wrestling with the question, 'What does outstanding work-based provision actually look like?'

The profiles of the providers, common success factors and practical examples in the report attempt to answer that question. Attention has been given to describing the journey the providers have travelled, the key challenges they faced, how they overcame them and the ways in which they are seeking to sustain excellence. I hope these narratives will be recognisable and resonate with others working in the sector. The report is intended to be a call to action, not a counsel of perfection. The 12 providers, no doubt, will have as much to learn from one another as readers working in other providers who aspire to the same level of success in work-based learning.

Work-based learning encompasses a broad range of different programmes that includes apprenticeships, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and other professional vocational qualifications, Skills for Life and employability training programmes. Although the report focuses mostly on apprenticeships and NVQs, the report considers factors leading to high performance in most forms of work-based learning. The features of outstanding provision it describes are equally true of providers whose work includes other employer-responsive programmes.

The Government has declared its intention to rebalance and grow the economy and has directed funds to support additional apprenticeship places. An important debate needs to take place among employers, training providers, funding bodies and agencies with responsibility for improving the quality of provision about the best and

most cost-effective ways to raise levels of skills nationally within a context of severe financial constraints. A starting point for such a discussion, therefore, is to define clearly what works. The providers in this report show the way forward and others can learn from them.

Casho Cither

The national picture

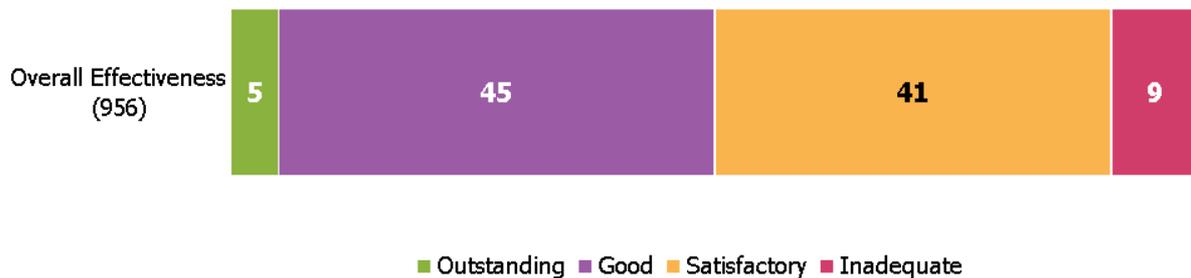
1. The work of the work-based learning sector represents a substantial investment in meeting the Government's objective to secure a better-trained and more competitive workforce. The costs of work-based learning programmes are met, in part, by government funding, but also by employers through training their own workforces, and by individuals seeking to improve their own skills and qualifications.
2. A wide range of providers is involved in government-funded, work-based learning. The providers include independent training providers, employer-based providers, further education colleges and most local authorities, as well as third sector organisations. Providers can deliver training locally or nationally, in one or several occupational areas; for themselves as an employer, or as a provider for employees of many small, or a few large, employers. Providers are also involved in skills development and employability programmes for those seeking to enter the workforce or return to work.

Work-based learning inspection outcomes

3. There has been an improving trend in inspection outcomes for work-based learning over the last five years. In inspections of providers other than colleges, the proportion of providers judged satisfactory or better has increased and the proportion found to be inadequate has declined sharply from 25% in 2004–05 to 8% in 2008–09. Of the providers judged to be inadequate and then subsequently reinspected, the vast majority improved to be satisfactory.
4. Within this positive picture, the proportion of providers judged outstanding has not seen improvement and remains too low. Even taking into account the degree of volatility in the overall provider base for work-based learning, which means that in any one year some providers that are new to inspection are included, the proportion found outstanding is small. The more specialised independent training providers or employer-based providers feature strongly in those judged to be outstanding. Of the 257 inspections of work-based learning conducted in 2007–08, 15 of the providers (6%) were outstanding; the equivalent figures in 2008–09 were 12 (5%) out of 242.¹ Of these outstanding providers, over three quarters were specialised providers, working in one main sector subject area.

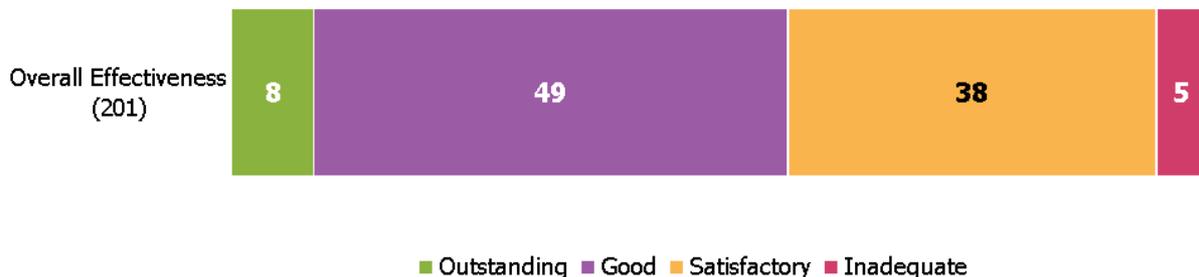
¹ These data include inspections of work-based learning carried out by the Adult Learning Inspectorate during the period April 2005 to March 2007.

Figure 1: Overall effectiveness of work-based learning providers inspected between April 2007 and August 2009 (percentage of providers)



5. In the college inspections where work-based learning was judged separately, 17 out of 201 colleges were deemed outstanding during the period September 2005 to August 2009. Nearly half of the colleges were judged to be good during this period. Even so, when comparing the judgement on the colleges' work-based learning with the judgement on their overall effectiveness (which encompasses all aspects of their work), the judgement for work-based learning is generally lower than that made on their overall effectiveness.

Figure 2: Overall effectiveness of work-based learning in colleges inspected between September 2005 and July 2009 (percentage of providers)



Scaling up the ambition

6. The challenge for the sector in raising the overall performance in work-based learning rests not just in eradicating inadequacy but also in increasing the numbers of providers who are good or outstanding and, through targeted measures, reducing the proportion of providers who are judged satisfactory, but who are not improving. High levels of attainment in work-based learning should be within the grasp not just of niche providers, but also those working in a range of different settings and vocational areas. The providers in this report have been selected to illustrate how this can be achieved.

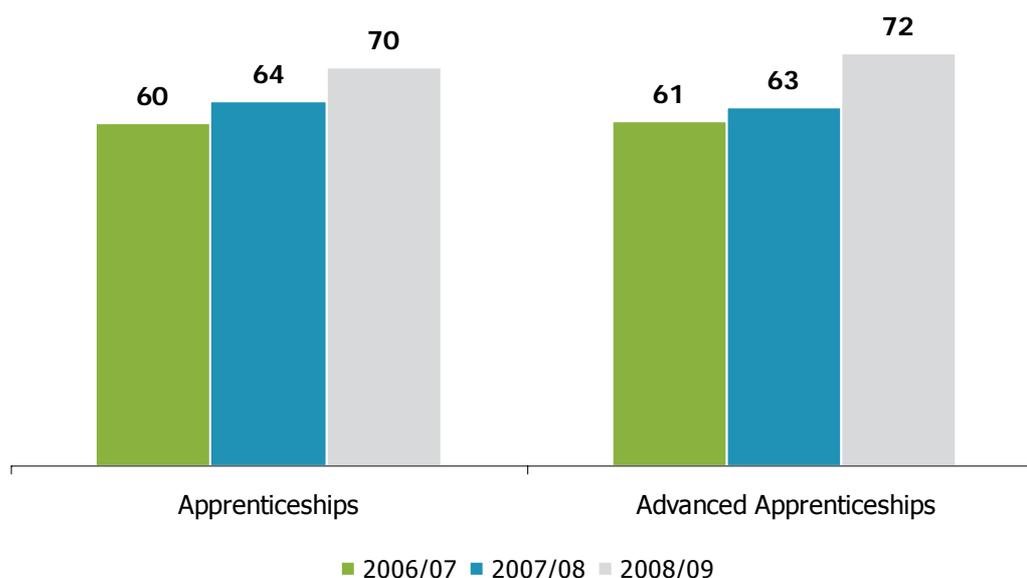
Recruitment to apprenticeships and success rates

7. Data published by the Data Service for 2008–09 show the highest participation for apprenticeships recorded in recent years with 239,900 starts.² As the tables below show, in the three-year period from 2006–07 to 2008–09, the numbers of learners involved in apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships have increased and overall success rates have improved steadily.³

Table 1: Apprenticeship starts by level in England between 2006/07 and 2008/09

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Apprenticeships	127,400	151,800	158,500
Advanced apprenticeships	57,000	73,000	81,400

Figure 3: Overall success rates for apprenticeships completing between 2006/07 and 2008/09 (percentage of learners)

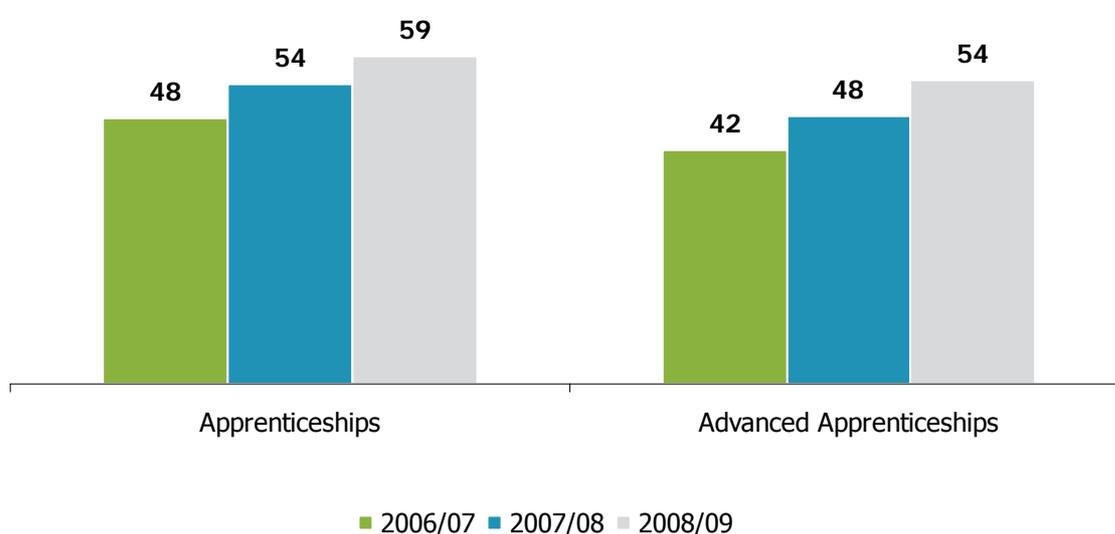


² See the Statistical First Release (SFR): DS/SFR7, June 2010, which can be found at: www.thedataservice.org.uk.

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 learners completing their qualifications can be counted as timely has been extended from one to three months after their planned completion date. This methodology for calculating success rates is now used in all QSR individual provider reports which can be accessed on the provider gateway. The two success rates for apprenticeship provision overall and timely are different, as the former captures all successful completions over time and the latter, successful completions occurring before or by the end date of a planned learning programme.

8. Providers are required to record a planned completion date for each learner, based on an initial assessment of their capabilities and relevant experience, taking into account what the particular programme requires. Timely success rates measure the proportion in each year of a provider’s learners who complete their programmes within the agreed timescales, allowing for completion up to three months after the agreed end date. Figure 4 shows an improvement in the proportion of apprentices completing their frameworks within the planned duration, but the picture is less positive than that for overall success rates.

Figure 4: Timely success rates for apprenticeships between 2006/07 and 2008/09 (percentage of learners)



The importance of timely completion

9. Not all learners are completing their frameworks and many are taking too long to do so. Clear planning and careful on-programme monitoring ensure that learners do not lose interest and benefit from what can be a powerful confidence-building experience in meeting a series of deadlines and completing their framework according to a schedule that has been agreed.
10. Value for money is an important aspect of this measure of performance. Improving timely success rates ensures that the resource devoted to training is maximised and that apprentices are in a position to apply their skills and take on responsibilities in the workplace at the earliest opportunity. Employers that are committed to training monitor closely the time an apprentice takes to start to add value to the work of the company and the employers will regularly evaluate the impact of the training on productivity.

11. As timely success rates improve, providers can redirect some of their resources, formerly expended on chasing up learners long after their planned completion date, to support those on programme and to recruit new learners. This report explains in detail the actions the providers took to improve learners' timely completion of their programmes.

Summary of the characteristics of outstanding providers

12. The following factors contributed to the 12 outstanding providers' journey to excellence.
 - Establishing shared purpose and ambitious goals
 - ensuring that the organisation's ethos and priorities for training are understood and committed to at all levels in the organisation
 - recruiting and developing staff with a passion for training and skills development
 - establishing a self-critical, high performance and ambitious culture.
 - Knowing the market and aligning provision to the needs of employers
 - analysing the current and future training needs of the sector(s) in which provision is being offered
 - making employers aware of the full range of provision and the benefits training can bring
 - involving employers in designing the programmes and being sure of the employers' commitment to training and supporting learners in the workplace.
 - Matching learners to the right programmes
 - ensuring that applicants are interviewed by staff with experience of working in the vocational area who can provide current information on opportunities for further learning and career progression
 - giving greater priority to recruiting learners on the basis of interest and motivation rather than solely by prior qualifications
 - where appropriate, offering trial periods, work tasters or pre-entry training programmes for those who need to develop confidence or who wish to gain experience before committing themselves to a vocational area.
 - Having high expectations in setting direction and monitoring learners' progress
 - setting the tone at induction and using initial assessment to identify early any need for learning support

- evaluating each learner’s job role to identify opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace
 - making the individual learning plan work as a key record of progress for learners, trainers and employers.
- Delivering a coherent programme of learning rooted in current working practice
 - getting the right balance of skills development, theoretical knowledge, preparation for assessment and external tests
 - enriching the learning experience through the development of employability skills.
 - Smart assessment to capture achievement and accelerate progress
 - maintaining a high frequency of reviews of learners to monitor their progress
 - establishing one assessor as a key point of contact throughout the programme and supporting assessors in managing their workloads
 - using online systems to monitor and record learning
 - maximising opportunities for assessment in the workplace.
 - Ensuring that barriers to learners’ progress are minimised
 - identifying barriers at the outset and being alert to potential problems that may arise during the programme
 - establishing strong partnerships with a range of specialist support agencies.
13. The following key actions were among those taken by providers to sustain excellence
- Keeping a focus on continuous and ambitious improvement, and not being content with current levels of performance.
 - Ensuring that feedback is collected on all aspects of the learners’ experience to maintain a high level of internal consistency and to identify actions required to rectify problems.
 - Maintaining the currency of staff’s skills and developing capacity in a fast-changing world.
 - Using management information intelligently to maintain an accurate picture of the progress of all learners, to identify trends in success rates and inform risk assessment.
 - Keeping the self-assessment processes inclusive and integral to business functions.

- Inviting external evaluation and challenge to guard against insularity
- Sharing good practice to keep new ideas in circulation and to encourage innovation.

Achieving excellence

Establishing clarity of purpose and ambitious goals

14. Clarity of purpose and ambitious goals are inherent in all aspects of the work of these outstanding providers. Staff at all levels understand clearly the strategic direction of training. Managers have fostered a self-critical and high performance culture, setting challenging targets for learners and staff and establishing the infrastructure to deliver them. They lead by example and engender an atmosphere of mutual respect among staff and learners alike.
15. Developing a workforce with the necessary experience, skills, dedication and commitment to enable them to aspire to being 'outstanding' has been a major challenge for all these providers. What has worked for most of them is the concept of 'growing your own'. This has involved recruiting individuals with the right technical skills and industrial experience, and then developing their teaching and assessment skills with the close support of mentors. The staff are proud to work for these providers and turnover is low. Staff are valued and their achievements are recognised. There is a shared passion for training which is clear when talking to managers, trainers, assessors or support staff. A typical comment heard from staff at several of the providers was:

'There are few jobs that I could do where I can make such a difference to people's lives. Many of our learners are having a second chance at learning and I get a real buzz from seeing them succeed with my help. Everyone who works here feels the same and we all felt a part of the achievement of being rated outstanding.'

16. These outstanding providers view the success of their training as depending on delivering high-quality training programmes that are relevant to industry, coupled with clear progression routes for moving successful learners into further training and employment. They prepare to succeed. New challenges are evaluated, changes are planned carefully and implemented to meet such challenges in a timely manner. The providers stay ahead by adapting what they do in a controlled way that minimises the possible negative impact of change on their continued success.

'We prioritised building a quality training service through promoting a clear company vision and a business action plan incorporating continuous and close employer engagement, especially with the leading "blue chip" IT companies. We held strongly to our belief that working in close partnership with employers was key to ensuring the quality and relevance

of training programmes and in providing links to employment opportunities for learners. This underpins all that we do and sets the ethos of the company.' (Managing Director, Zenos Ltd)

'I'm evangelical about the vocational route in education, particularly apprenticeships, and the need to ensure that it is an equitable route for success. Everybody should have the ability to achieve economic well-being in life, whatever their previous level of educational attainment has been.' (Chief Executive, Hospitality Training Partnership)

'Our philosophy is to deliver high-quality training and provide total customer satisfaction – and we take great pride in being instrumental in developing the skills and employability of young people within Derby City centre and the surrounding areas. Young people on apprenticeships are the future of British industry. We believe that, by delivering high-quality training and giving learners the individual support they need throughout their programme, we are making a huge contribution to both their personal and career development.' (Director of TS2000)

The directors have established a culture where staff and learners have high expectations of themselves and each other. As one said: 'Second best is not good enough.' Staff turnover is very low and reflects the commitment of staff to learners and to the company. Staff and learners enjoy the open and highly supportive management style at TS2000. One staff member said, 'We succeed and fail together. If I have a difficulty with one of my learners, it is a problem for us to share and to solve together.'

Knowing the market and aligning provision to the needs of employers

17. These outstanding providers have productive and mutually supportive relationships with a range of employers as a means of ensuring high-quality training. Employers working closely with providers' staff feel part of the training process and contribute meaningfully to its planning and management at all stages. Senior managers often lead on engaging with employers by making annual visits, sending newsletters and seeking views on how to improve their service. Several providers have developed their own dedicated recruitment teams to engage with employers, to raise awareness of the provider and to emphasise the benefits of training to their businesses.
18. Many of these outstanding providers ensure that employers demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the success of their work-based learners before the providers agree to work with them. The employers must be right for prospective learners where the providers act as recruiters. They check that employers can meet all the requirements needed in the workplace to enable

learners to acquire the full range of NVQ skills and achieve the apprenticeship framework and, where necessary, they put arrangements in place so that learners can complete all aspects of their programmes.

19. Employers frequently suggest topics that they want to include in training; tutors work with the employers and learners to provide them. These providers ensure that learners experience current practices at work and during off-the-job training by keeping their staff updated and working closely with employers in developing learning materials.

Skillnet, which specialises in automotive engineering training, recognised the importance of the 'brand' to large employers. It customised delivery arrangements for each manufacturer that it dealt with while making sure that it still delivered the basic framework needed for an apprenticeship. All the staff have developed specialist knowledge of the brands they support, and receive regular updates from the manufacturers to make sure that their knowledge is kept up to date. The After Sales Services manager at DAF Trucks commented: 'Here at DAF, our dealers and their training are part of the DAF "family". When our apprenticeship programme went out to tender, we were looking for a provider that understood our philosophy and we found it in Skillnet. We need a professional and efficient service for our dealers and our customers. Skillnet has the right attitude. Their trainers identify strongly with our brand and know what they're talking about – our dealers really appreciate this.'

5E has identified and targeted needs in the local workforce within the care industry, ICT sector and school teaching assistants. For example, the company is responding to a local need for trained carers by providing those working in the care industry with opportunities to develop their communication skills through its range of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, offered alongside its NVQ programmes in health and social care.

Zenos identified a deficit in the numbers of 'job ready' young people in IT and developed its academy and work-based learning provision, in conjunction with large employers, to provide programme-led advanced apprenticeships in IT and associated qualifications. One large IT company reported that the average age of its IT engineers was 55; this pattern is not unusual, and yet young people find it very difficult to secure employment within the industry. Most major IT companies prefer to recruit older, more experienced staff and few have set up basic training schemes to include young people. Zenos helped to change the perceptions of many IT employers about employing this age group. Employers' feedback indicated that qualified learners 'hit the ground running' when

the learners came to take up their job roles. Large companies such as EDS and Fujitsu repeatedly returned to Zenos to employ learners when they had completed their training.

Matching learners to the right programmes

20. All these outstanding providers pay close attention to ensuring that potential learners are matched to programmes that are well-suited to their needs and those of their present or potential employers. Thorough procedures for recruitment and selection are a contributory factor in helping to improve both overall and timely success rates.
21. Improvements made to the initial advice and guidance given at recruitment events or interviews 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 a programme of work-based learning
 - providing an overview of working in particular industries and related career paths.
22. Many initial indications of interest are received through the providers' websites. Online methods of application, including preliminary testing of English and mathematics, have helped providers to find out whether applicants would be able to cope with the more difficult areas of the apprenticeship frameworks. Online methods have also allowed national employers to offer training and work in areas closer to the homes of learners. This has been a factor in improving success rates.
23. Some of these providers use work tasters and trial periods with supportive employers to enable potential learners to have experience of working in the particular area of learning that interests them. This helps learners to assess the suitability of their proposed programmes while also developing their self-confidence. Several of these providers have pre-entry training programmes, such as Young Apprenticeships or NVQ level 1, that provide progression routes to apprenticeships, giving young people a better understanding of the area of learning and the way that work-based learning operates.
24. These outstanding providers give prominence to recruiting learners from groups traditionally under-represented in training. They show a clear understanding of the potential benefits to the industries in which they work by recruiting learners from a wider client base. Routine and effective collection and use of participation data have greatly enhanced providers' abilities to refine and focus their recruitment strategies.

As a national employer, British Gas has worked hard to make its workforce more representative of the diverse communities which it serves. British Gas Energy Academy undertakes effective promotional and marketing activities to recruit learners from under-represented groups. Staff have participated in extensive publicity campaigns all over the country to promote careers in gas engineering for school pupils. National promotional campaigns make good use of innovative recruitment advertising to target women and minority ethnic groups. Their recruitment materials contain representative images and there are many role models of successful learners for new learners to aspire to. In a male-dominated industry, approximately 15% of all learners are now women and 15% are from a minority ethnic background.

Having high expectations in setting direction and monitoring learners' progress

25. The best inductions help learners to understand clearly what is expected of them in order to complete their programme successfully. Most of these providers use extended inductions, sometimes over several weeks. New learners are given time to show a commitment to training and become enthused and more aware of the benefits of training. Many learners are assigned mentors at work, often experienced employees, who have themselves previously been apprentices and who understand the kinds of problems that they may be able to help with.
26. The outstanding providers who work with a range of employers frequently extend their induction arrangements to include an evaluation of each new learner's job role. Opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace are identified, mapped to the requirements of the NVQ, technical certificate and key skills, and incorporated into learning plans. Aspects of the programme for which work-based evidence would be hardest to come by are identified at an early stage and appropriate plans are made to offer a broader range of experiences and develop a wider variety of skills to ensure timely completion.
27. Providers of work-based learning commonly use individual learning plans as a key document for learners, training staff, and employers to record and guide learning. The plans can serve as a useful record of progress against target milestones for each part of the programme, but they vary widely in their effectiveness in ensuring high outcomes.
28. These 12 providers design the individual learning plans to be 'live' documents and they are updated regularly throughout each learner's programme. Staff are trained to use them and the plans are audited to ensure that they are reflecting each learner's needs. The following factors indicate how these 12 providers make individual learning plans work:

- fully involving the learners in initially drafting the plan and ensuring that all elements of the plan are negotiated, understood and agreed with the learner
- making sure that employers and supervisors at work are fully aware of aims and targets recorded in the plan, in order to be able to support their learner better
- setting and recording a clear sequence for delivering elements of the training programmes, for example NVQ units, to ensure that all parties involved in the training are able to follow and monitor progress
- indicating where training programmes have choices of optional units; such choices are made after negotiation with the employer and the learner so that what is chosen better reflects the job and assessment opportunities
- using the plans to record additional needs for support and how it is provided, keeping all parties informed and ensuring that the support is an integral part of learning
- setting targets that are appropriate for individuals to reflect each learner's specific circumstances and abilities, for example, those who have previous experience or who require additional support
- enabling tutors, assessors and learners to have online access to individual learning plans so that there is prompt and convenient updating of information, including the outcomes of assessments of learners' competences; online access was universally popular with the providers that had begun to use it.

Delivering a coherent programme of learning rooted in current working practice

29. The way that these outstanding providers structured their programmes varied. In engineering, the use of block-release training in well-resourced venues, often involving residential accommodation, was the preferred model. Others operated a day-release system where learners attended for one day each week or fortnight throughout their training. For employers who find difficulty in releasing employees each week, a workshop model to deliver theory training is used. These providers are very flexible in scheduling the workshops and frequently run them in the evenings and at weekends to fit their learners' working patterns. Some models rely almost entirely on delivery in the workplace, with the training provided by employers being used effectively.
30. All learners gain elements of practical and theory training at work by virtue of doing their jobs. Whatever model of delivery is used, the better performance by outstanding providers is influenced by linking this well to the requirements of the NVQ, key skills and technical certificates. This brings coherence to the programme and takes full advantage of the experience that learners have gained in the workplace.

31. These outstanding providers ensure good and timely delivery of key skills by introducing them at induction and making them relevant to the vocational area. By contextualising topics in key skills and by delivering the NVQ and key skills side by side, learners and their employers can see their relevance to their work. Introducing online testing had helped to increase the numbers of learners passing key skills and other theory tests on their first attempt.
32. The following factors have a major impact on developing learners' skills and knowledge and help them to pass assessments and external tests:
- planning delivery for the whole programme and sharing planning with employers to engage their support in learning through on-the-job activities, and ensuring these are closely aligned with off-the-job training
 - recruiting staff with strong, current vocational backgrounds that allow them to engage with their learners and relate their teaching to the vocational area and to a learner's workplace
 - delivering practical and theory training in teams, to make the best use of the specialist practical skills and knowledge of staff
 - developing learning resource materials that encourage learners to use them outside taught sessions or with mentors in the workplace
 - including teaching in the workplace by working with mentors who explain how theory is put into practice
 - offering services outside the working day, such as support for key skills and sessions on building a portfolio
 - offering testing on demand when learners are ready, supported by revision activities and example tests so that learners are prepared.

For the Aspire Training Team, getting learners released for off-the-job training was a constant challenge, as employers needed to maintain mandatory levels of staffing at all times. The team used a variety of solutions, such as changing tutorial days and delivering on the quieter days in the nursery or care home, persuading managers to employ extra learners to help to provide cover for one another or to arrange for learners to swap to different workplaces to cover for each other. They arranged extra tutorials when a learner was refused permission to leave work, and supported managers and the supervisors of assessors to ensure that learners were trained in the workplace rather than left to learn on their own initiative.

Engineering apprentices at British Gas follow a carefully planned programme that consists of blocks of time within an academy followed by 'field experience weeks', working alongside qualified engineers and

undertaking the same sort of activities as those completed in the academy. This model is replicated for each training module that an apprentice completes. It is designed to enable apprentices to gain the required knowledge, understanding and practical skills within the academy before developing these skills outside by working alongside qualified engineers. Apprentices are extremely well supported and make rapid progress.

Warwickshire College makes innovative use of information learning technology to support learners' studies and to enhance teaching and curriculum development. Courses have a range of good learning materials that are available through the college's online 'learning channel'. In construction, for example, materials are used for assignment work and as assessment tools, and for electrical courses they help learners to self-test their mathematics skills and their knowledge of workshop practice. Good use is made of the e-portfolio to track the work and progress of apprentices, and video-conferencing is used by the engineering industrial training manager to review apprentices in the workplace. Video evidence in the workplace provides witness testimonies of skills gained and the work completed by learners, so reducing the time spent on completing portfolios of evidence.

Employability skills

33. These outstanding providers enhance work-based learning with activities that enrich the learning experience. Frequently, as well as enabling learners to gain the industry-relevant qualifications valued by employers, in addition to the primary target qualification, additional activities are provided to help learners to develop the full set of skills needed to establish a career. To maintain a high level of challenge and to motivate the learners, there are often opportunities to experience the 'top end' of their chosen industries: for example, in hospitality, a five star hotel; a Grand Prix race in automotive engineering; or a flagship store in retail.

Andrew Collinge has enriched its training by including specialist workshops on creative make-up, colouring and emerging techniques, promoting services and product sales, permanent waving and long hair techniques – all of which are highly valued by learners. The advanced apprenticeship programme incorporates an experience of a photo-shoot and a high-profile hair show, and all learners train for an inter-salon competition attended by salon employers and parents.

Zenos's strategy for training is centred on the 'development of the whole person', focusing on providing a full set of skills essential to establishing a

career within the IT industry. Learners' employment skills such as their appearance, demeanour, reliability, capacity to take responsibility, team-working, attendance and punctuality are instilled as part of the training. Developing a strong work ethic is valued by employers. One former learner commented how 'seamless' it had been to move from training into employment. Learners are motivated through realistic prospects of employment at the end of training. Field-based teams give learners the skills to improve their chances of securing jobs. This is done by improving their skills in writing a curriculum vitae and letters of application, and ensuring that they perform well at interviews. Progression into jobs is maintained at over 90%, illustrating the effectiveness of these arrangements.

Smart assessment to capture achievement and accelerate progress

Frequency of reviews

34. In all these outstanding providers, regular visits by staff to the workplace combined with effective reviews help learners to make good progress with their assessments. The providers often conduct reviews more frequently than contractually required because they recognise the value of regular checks on progress. Reviews are included as part of the observation of training schemes to improve their quality and to identify good practice.

At Andrew Collinge it was decided that there were benefits in reviewing learners in the workplace every eight weeks rather than every 12, talking regularly to employers and focusing on those whose employees were most in need of support. The ratio of learners to assessors has always been kept low, no more than one trainer to 10 learners, helping to ensure that support is quickly on hand when developing skills and ensuring that no-one feels that they are being left behind.

Hospitality Training Partnership's training consultants are in regular contact with learners and provide additional support outside their normal visits to learners at work. The frequent visits to workplaces are well-planned, flexible, and very effective in helping learners to progress through their programme. Employers provide very good support. They participate actively in reviewing learners' progress and in preparing action plans for development or assessment. Learners who require extra support for their qualifications, or to meet their needs in literacy, language and numeracy, are given additional time and support to improve their knowledge and skills.

The role of the key assessor

35. These outstanding providers' high timely success rates have been achieved by careful monitoring of training and by using management information effectively in planning the work of their assessors. Many of the learners and their employers commented that having one key assessor as a point of contact throughout their training was a very positive feature of the arrangements. The most successful assessors ensure that their learners do not work on too many units at once. Learners feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction in signing off each completed unit as well as providing a very visible indication of progress. The assessors also work in close partnership with employers and supervisors to ensure that they are aware of what programme elements the learner needs to complete and how they could support them before the assessor's next visit.

Using a named NVQ assessor with responsibility for managing the learners' programme is a key factor in the success of the work-based learning courses at Gateshead College. The NVQ assessor does not have any timetabled teaching commitment and is responsible solely for assessing the learner. The NVQ assessor has flexibility to arrange assessment when the learner is ready and is able to assess on employers' premises, directly observing the learner completing real-life work. This arrangement ensures that learners are not duplicating assessment tasks and establishes good and supportive relationships between the assessor and the learner. Frequent contact with NVQ assessors ensures that learners are making the progress expected and achieving within the timescales set. The NVQ assessor is the single point of contact for the employer. The good relationships established often result in requests for additional business.

Supporting assessors

36. Managers regard the quality of their assessor teams as critical to achieving and maintaining excellence. They ensure that their assessors and internal verifiers hold current and relevant qualifications and that they have frequent opportunities to attend industry-related conferences and training workshops to update their knowledge. Assessors are well supported in their work. This was one of the reasons that staff turnover was low in most of the outstanding providers visited.
37. To become outstanding, assessors must be able to cope with their workloads and be motivated enough to be able to work independently away from a centre. Making contact with a centre, usually weekly, was regarded as essential to keep staff motivated and in contact with others doing the same job. It gave assessors the chance to share their experiences and, in some cases, to ask others for advice.

The benefits of online systems

38. Most of these outstanding providers have invested considerably in online systems to record and monitor learning. The providers report more effective tracking of learners' progress and improved outcomes for them following the introduction of e-portfolios and online access to learning materials.

At Davidson Training, a system of online portfolios, recording of progress, and assessment has been instrumental in helping learners to make faster progress in gaining their qualifications. It has enabled more regular contact between learners and assessors, as well as quicker feedback on a wide range of evidence that learners can upload for assessors to see. Assessing learners' competence is a continuing process without the need for assessors to wait for the review meetings every two or three weeks. This also saves the assessors' time in travelling to see learners.

As the learners and assessors are in regular contact through email and the electronic submission of evidence (pictures, videos or written evidence and testimonials), the more frequent feedback has enabled the assessors to tailor assessment more effectively to the progress each learner is making. Assessors can concentrate more on ensuring that learners meet their agreed targets and providing support as necessary. Internal verifiers and managers also use the system to monitor learners' and assessors' progress more effectively and to ensure that learners are meeting their targets.

Although the online system has been a significant financial investment for the company, it has brought benefits. The next stage in e-learning is to acquire a wider range of online learning packages and to move to a process of online learner reviews.

Assessment in the workplace

39. Inspection reports often cite a lack of work-based assessment as the main cause of poor overall and timely success rates. Engaging employers successfully in training and assessing learners has been an important factor in improving work-based assessment.
40. These 12 outstanding providers have improved the amount of evidence gathered from the workplace by working with their employers. Along with improved target-setting and reviews, they cited this as a main driver in improving timely success. They saw involving employers in assessment as key to ensuring that relevant and timely opportunities were planned into learners' schedules and fitted well with their working practices.
41. These providers recognise the benefits gained from supplementing their own teams of assessors with work-based assessors recruited from the employers'

staff. In many cases, work-based assessors have been learners with the provider previously. Having a qualified assessor in the workplace, working alongside the apprentice, enables competences to be accredited when tasks are completed to the required standard. This eliminates the need to involve additional staff since an assessor is already present, thus saving time. It also means that assessment tasks are not duplicated within simulated environments.

42. In these providers, the common features of the best practice in engaging employers in assessment include:
- providing employers with clear written guidance on NVQ programmes and apprenticeship frameworks
 - sharing off-the-job training schedules to involve employers and helping them to plan better to develop their learners' employability skills
 - tailoring the delivery of training and assessment to meet the needs of employers
 - making pre-arranged, regular visits to the workplace
 - ensuring the continuity of the provider's staff who are working with learners and employers, therefore building strong working relationships
 - providing training for assessor awards which can be delivered in the workplace, and encouraging the employer's staff to take on roles as assessors
 - being responsive and taking advantage of opportunities for assessment in the workplace at short notice
 - establishing forums for employers to encourage communication about training.

Ensuring that barriers to learners' progress are minimised

43. A common feature in these providers is the provision of learning support from the beginning of a learner's programme. This may be given within group theory sessions or through additional workshops. Mentors in the workplace also give one-to-one support. The opportunity to telephone, text or email their assessors at any time is widely appreciated by learners.
44. Support for learners often extends beyond that for learning alone. The providers have strong partnerships with a range of specialist agencies and procedures to identify problems work well. Prompt action is taken to refer learners for specialist advice and support when they are needed; the providers do not always assume that they have to provide all this themselves.
45. Some of the outstanding providers continue to support learners even after they have completed their programmes. For example, at British Gas, academy staff continue to monitor learners' performance in the workplace after they complete their apprenticeships. Any additional needs for technical training are identified

and there is good support to provide this. At Zenos, excellent personal support for learners from student liaison officers during and after the programme ensures continuity and raises learners' motivation. Very effective job coaching by vocationally experienced staff enhances learners' chances of success in gaining employment.

The apprentices at Skillnet are from all over the country, and many are under 18, so managers recognise the importance of providing someone apprentices can talk to. One manager commented, 'We realised that some were dropping out because they weren't properly prepared for a residential course, so I meet them all during induction, and we make sure the structure is properly explained.'

Every apprentice has an assigned mentor at work and an out-of-hours phone number for a member of staff. Female Skillnet staff also mentor female apprentices if the employer has no suitable colleague. Skillnet has recently introduced a guide for mentors, as some employers were unclear about this role.

The induction programme includes a session at the hotel to introduce its rules, facilities and support arrangements. The same hotel is used later as a base for other training. 'We keep close contact with the hotel, and always make sure that we follow up any absence promptly. If they haven't turned up at their college by the first break, we ring to find out what is wrong.'

The good relationship with the hotels has other advantages. During the snow in the winter of 2010, Skillnet ran classes in the hotels even when the colleges had closed. 'It's quite a lot of work to set up these systems and to keep regular contact, but it's worth it, because we can deal with anything that happens before it becomes serious. We rarely get any trouble. Our apprentices are a credit to their employers.'

Sustaining excellence

46. This section describes the key actions being taken by these providers to sustain excellence.

Moving from a culture of compliance to one of continuous improvement

47. These providers have established a culture of accountability based on universally understood indicators of success. Each provider has a comprehensive quality assurance framework, often developed in consultation with staff rather than being presented as a ready-made system. The staff feel a sense of ownership as a result and talk about 'our quality system' rather than 'the quality system'. In discussions with inspectors, the staff working at

different levels in each provider readily listed what they felt they were good at and what they felt they needed to improve. A change in approach to improving rather than assuring quality was described on several occasions, moving away from a culture of compliance to a culture of improvement. One member of staff with a role in improving quality said:

‘We took a while to realise that the reason we had not improved some areas such as learning and lesson plans was that we had an audit mentality of ticking boxes that things were in place, but we were not judging how good they were. It sounds obvious, looking back on it now, but it wasn’t at the time.’

Systematic evaluation of all aspects of the learner’s experience

48. One of the critical factors in maintaining high standards has been the extension of traditional classroom-based observation to all aspects of the training process. All observers are trained. In the case of four providers, using peer observation from other providers, organised through a peer-referencing partnership, is helping to confirm the robustness of grading.
49. Observations are a means to an end and not an end in themselves. Effective observation does several things. It tells managers:
 - how good the off-the-job ‘taught’ theory and practical sessions are
 - how good the resources are that are used for delivering off-the-job training
 - how good the delivery of theory and practical training is in the workplace, so that this area of a learner’s experience can also be improved
 - how good reviews and target setting are, a critical feature in maintaining and improving timely success rates.

It also:

- identifies best practice, both by the provider and their employers, helping to identify possible improvements
 - gives a body of first-hand ‘hard evidence’ for self-assessment through grading observed activities, demonstrating whether different aspects are improving
 - identifies, for individual tutors and trainers, areas that need specific, tailored development.
50. All 12 outstanding providers gather feedback successfully from their learners. Methods include surveys, meetings of group representatives, visits to the workplace by the provider’s staff, suggestion boxes and email addresses for giving feedback. Several of the centres visited had posters telling learners the results of surveys or, where most of the training was in the workplace, they were included in the mailing of newsletters. Through collecting information in

this way, the providers were able to show that learners' satisfaction levels were continually improving or were being maintained at very high levels. The providers felt that learners' feedback confirmed that what they were doing was working and, in some cases, gave hard evidence that a change had been successful, such as giving learners access to a provider's intranet while at work or from home.

Maintaining the currency of staff's skills and developing capacity in a fast-changing world

51. Staff in these outstanding providers are involved in a wide range of professional development. Teaching qualifications are championed and staff update their knowledge through work placements, taking courses, attending trade shows and researching new techniques and trends. Some enter competitions to demonstrate their skills; they may be well known in their particular occupational areas because of this. All this helps to enthuse learners who know that they are being taught the latest technology in engineering or fashion technique in hairdressing. Employers respect the providers' staff and often seek their advice.
52. A number of these outstanding providers demonstrated effective succession planning. This was particularly evident in the way in which they increased the number of qualified internal verifiers (allowing assessors to understand assessment better and to encourage their job progression). They also devolved aspects of management so that more staff had the chance to develop management skills. Managers have a clear vision of how they intend to invest in and develop resources, often piloting the use of new equipment such as digital voice recorders or intranet-based learning materials before introducing them to all learners.

Using management information intelligently

53. All 12 outstanding providers use management information very effectively to monitor the progress and performance of individual learners, employers and staff. This shows the continued effectiveness of their delivery. It ensures that any slippage is identified quickly so that corrective action can be taken, and it informs risk assessments. The providers ensure that data are kept accurate or, as one provider put it, it was vital to maintain 'one version of the truth'. Monitoring progress against targets is rigorous and seen as everyone's responsibility.

By investing across the company in electronic systems to support both learning and data capture, Intraining has a detailed and current picture of each learner in terms of their qualifications, achievement and other requirements for funding purposes. This has been crucial in enabling such a large provider to improve success rates.

Assessors photograph documentation relating to learners' agreements and reviews documentation, and upload this to a central system, combining an online database and an electronic portfolio system. A team of operational support advisers checks the documentation carefully to ensure that learners meet the awarding body and funding requirements.

The advisers also provide guidance for and support to assessors on what is needed so that course administration runs smoothly and to agreed targets. This highly successful support process facilitates timely completion of apprenticeship frameworks and other work-based qualifications from start-up to accreditation. Close monitoring enables the advisers to let assessors know about learners who have not received an assessment visit within the agreed timeframe. Piloting the use of electronic signatures on documentation is planned to speed up the process further.

Following training and support from more experienced users, all the assessors across the company record learners' assessment online. Weekly and monthly reporting on progress enables potential problems to be identified early and prompt support to be put in place.

Intraining's focus on a coordinated approach to managing data and recording learners' progress supports very successful monitoring and therefore the good timely achievement of learners' qualifications.

Keeping the self-assessment processes inclusive and integral to business functions

54. Self-assessment is taken very seriously in all of the 12 outstanding providers in the survey. It is the culmination of their quality improvement procedures and gives an annual overview of their provision. As one provider put it: 'It is our own version of an inspection report in the years in between inspection; inspection confirms we are getting it right.'
55. A number of features characterised the effective practice:
 - the process is inclusive, involving staff, learners, employers and partners
 - the process is thorough and may involve activities such as whole days devoted to reviewing provision
 - provision is subject to an unwaveringly honest and critical eye; although high-performing, these providers continually seek to improve each year; strengths identified in previous years are not taken for granted and satisfactory levels of performance are regarded as not being good enough
 - development plans produced following self-assessment are divided into different aspects of delivery, common themes are identified and shared so

that everyone is aware of the planned actions and their responsibilities for meeting targets; actions become integral to business practice

- the plans are updated regularly and monitored to ensure that the targets for quality improvement are met.

Inviting external evaluation and challenge and sharing good practice to keep new ideas in circulation

56. These outstanding providers welcome an external perspective on their provision, whether through taking part in peer reviews, achieving quality awards or inspection. Some of the typical responses from providers to their experience of inspection included: 'It made us take time to stand back and look at what we are doing and how well we were doing it' and 'We found it motivating to have an independent evaluation of the company.' All the providers welcomed inspection as an opportunity to gain public recognition for their outstanding contributions to training. 'We thought we were pretty good, but not sure quite how good'; 'It was so motivating to get the excellence of our provision endorsed by an independent team of specialists.' The Directors at InTraining said:

'Our philosophy is always to be inspection-ready. Even with the onset of self-regulation, there still needs to be an independent body to let you know exactly how you are doing. Being monitored on a regular basis will help us to provide value for money and ensure we always meet the needs of learners and employers.'

57. Staff at outstanding providers are acutely aware of the performance of other similar providers through Ofsted's inspection reports. Interest in inspection reports often rises following notification of an impending inspection, but these providers use inspection reports routinely as signposts to good practice and make comparative evaluations of their own provision as part of their quality improvement procedures.

58. Volunteering and exchanging ideas on what works are key features of the organisational culture. These providers ensure there are plenty of opportunities to share good practice, whether as a standard agenda item in meetings, items in newsletters or on intranets.

Davidson Training uses innovative arrangements to ensure that assessors and internal verifiers meet frequently to share their experiences and discuss working practices. To accommodate its team of assessors and internal verifiers, all of whom have a caseload of learners and work either from home or on employer's premises, Davidson adopts a 'Monday in the office' policy, so that all assessors can review progress, discuss any issues, and support each other. Training is also held on Mondays to develop

assessors' knowledge of the qualification frameworks and approaches to assessment and monitoring progress.

Provider profiles

Andrew Collinge Training

59. Andrew Collinge Training Limited (Andrew Collinge) is a privately owned training company that provides work-based hairdressing training in Liverpool, Wirral, Chester, south west Lancashire and Manchester. It has eight salons incorporating two training centres in Liverpool and Birkenhead. The company has been judged to be outstanding for hairdressing in three consecutive inspections, most recently in September 2007.
60. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 150 learners, a third of whom were employed in Andrew Collinge salons and the rest in salons in the local area. There are many more applicants than places. Those recruited are judged on their aptitude to be hairdressers rather than on their academic qualifications. A typical statement from a learner about the training was:

'The tutors here help you to gain confidence quickly. I know that one day I will be as good as some of the best stylists here and could work anywhere. The sky's the limit.'

How work-based learning is delivered

61. Apprentices attend weekly off-the-job training at one of the two training schools, combined with training in the workplace provided by their employers. Assessment takes place in both settings. To assist with this, managers in salons have been given help to qualify as assessors. Advanced apprentices attend graduate training for a day each week in the graduate salon, with Andrew Collinge employees remaining in this salon full-time. Many enrichment activities help to extend skills development, including extra courses to develop additional skills in areas such as: barbering and dressing long hair; links with Tate Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University; invitations to attend trade fairs and presentations on the latest product developments; and work for competitions and visits from high-profile practitioners in the industry.

The provider's view of training

62. Training its own staff was a way of ensuring that employees were capable of working to the standard required of the employer's business. New staff graduating from the apprenticeship training allowed the company to expand while maintaining high company standards. Unusually for an employer delivering its own training, Andrew Collinge extended its training skills to other employers in the region, even though they are business competitors.
63. Andrew Collinge said:

'At Andrew Collinge we believe passionately in delivering quality training. Many of our young people have gone on to achieve successful and rewarding careers within the hairdressing industry. It is our belief that, by sharing our knowledge and expertise to all trainees, employed by ourselves or by other employers, it is beneficial to hairdressing as a whole.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- A team was developed in-house, with each team member given responsibility for a particular aspect. Staff specialised in carrying out reviews, delivering different skills levels, supporting learners and quality assuring assessment and training.
- Limited staff turnover has helped to develop strong working relationships with employers, and learners are known to all members of the team.
- Training tasters, initial assessment and good induction have helped learners to have a clear plan about what they need to do.
- Learners work competitively to be good enough to be assessed at an early stage. A strong focus on tracking learners' progress (using Andrew Collinge's own electronic tracking system) identifies any learner who is falling behind so that extra support is given. Setting milestone dates for units to be completed and providing extra support when required have helped to maintain high success rates.

What were the challenges?

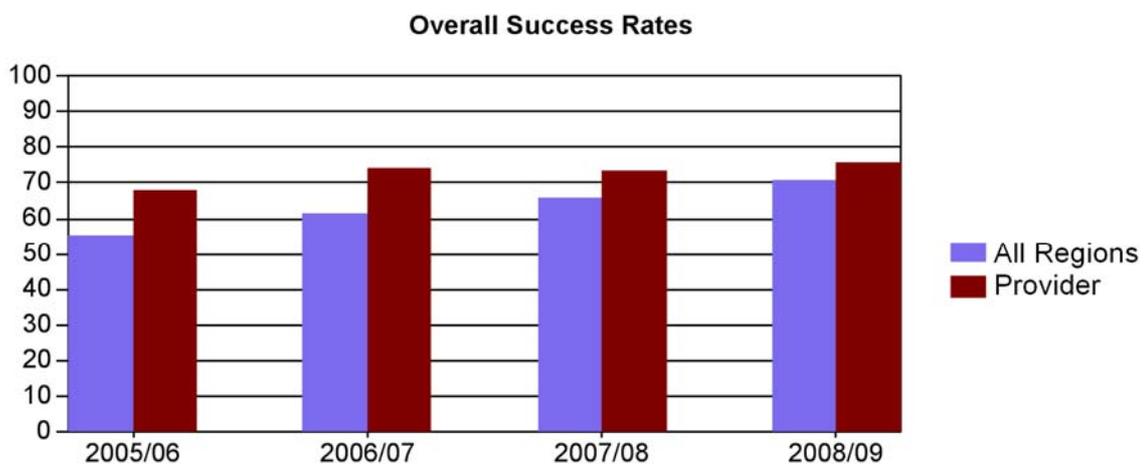
64. Knowing how to develop practical skills was always a strength because of the quality and background of the training staff. Getting key skills right by developing staff to deliver them, then integrating the teaching so that learners and their employers could see the point and support them, was the most difficult aspect. Ensuring that employers were giving their learners sufficient access to clients in order to provide opportunities to develop their skills at Level 3 was key to achieving high advanced apprenticeship success rates. Working hard to get the right numbers and range of clients for learners to develop their practical skills and then arranging for this work to be formally assessed was, and continues to be, a challenge in the context of a commercial salon environment.

How are high standards maintained?

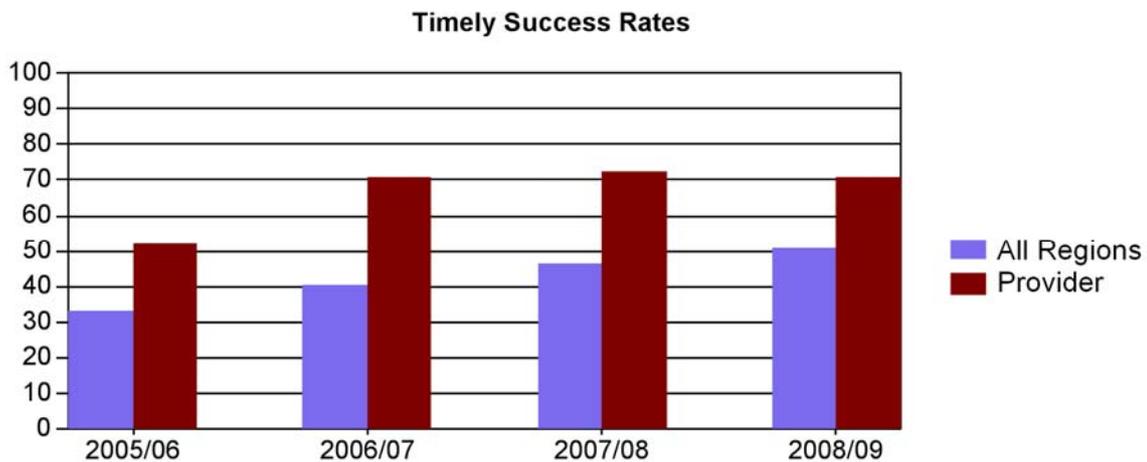
- Training staff liaise with other hairdressing providers in Merseyside, engaging in peer review activities such as observing teaching.
- Staff visit other providers further afield that they might learn from; they host visits themselves, so that others have the opportunity to learn from them.

- They regularly read inspection reports and use the Ofsted good practice database, located on the LSIS Excellence Gateway.
- Quality assurance and self-assessment play an important part both in maintaining current standards of training and in identifying areas that could be developed further. Improvements in the past two years include planning on a three-monthly basis rather than for the whole year; this has helped learners to maintain their focus on completing one set of targets at a time.
- A former trainer is employed for two days a week as additional support tutor, to concentrate on timely achievement, working with those with additional learning needs or who have fallen behind or been a late starter.
- Learners' individual achievements and effort are recognised by certificates for excellence for areas such as achieving on time, 100% attendance or demonstrating professionalism. These are given out at an awards and competition event.
- Introducing a second year parents' evening has helped retention and promotes progression to level 3.

Figure 7: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?⁴



⁴ These data, provided by the Data Service, are based on revised methods of calculation, agreed with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and as such the 'All Regions' overall rates differ from historic summary data provided in DS/SFR7, 2010. Also, for illustrative purposes, the Timely 'All Region' Success Rates are shown along with the equivalent provider success rates.



Aspire Training Team

65. Aspire Training Team is part of the Hadland Care Group which also includes Tops Day Nurseries and Reside care homes. It offers a range of courses, all related to working in a care environment. It works with learners in Dorset, Somerset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. A key feature of the Hadland Care Group and the Aspire Training Team is that the vast majority of managers and staff have trained and progressed within the group. Having been judged good in 2005, Aspire was judged to be outstanding in December 2009.
66. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 101 care learners: 92 on apprenticeships and nine on NVQs funded through Train to Gain. Aspire selects learners on the basis of aptitude and attitude to caring work and does not necessarily refuse people who do not have specific qualifications. As such, it trains learners from a wide educational spectrum. A significant proportion of the learners have educational or social difficulties and Aspire actively supports learners to overcome barriers to progress. This was a typical comment from a learner about training:

‘Time at the centre is well planned by the assessor and centre managers. They really are flexible in meeting your needs and the individual support means we keep up with our work. On my level 2, I was booked out for whole days so I could catch up after I had been ill in hospital – they always make sure you don’t get behind.’

How work-based learning is delivered

67. Training and assessment are delivered mainly on the job but a significant feature of the delivery is the well-planned off-the-job workshops. These run monthly, for three days, and learners attend for the full three-day block. During this time they complete theory work related to the units they are working on,

meet their tutors and have individual sessions with their key assessor, who also works with them in the workplace.

The provider's view of training

68. The managing director commented:

'All our assessors and verifiers come from day nurseries and care homes and continue to work closely within these work-based settings. This is where their expertise and therefore our strength lies. Many also have (or have had) children or parents in the settings we work with, and we recognise that this is useful in providing an extra incentive to provide top-quality training to enable the staff to provide top-quality care.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- Delivering training mainly in the workplace means that the needs of learners of varying abilities are met quickly. The support that learners receive from assessors is readily available to individuals every day, ensuring that they are not left to struggle with any area.
- The three-day workshops and time away from the workplace to complete their theory work enables the learners to link practice and theory, to share ideas and good practice, to offer support and receive it from their peers, and to receive individual support to match their own needs.
- Aspire assigns a lot of resources to assessment and to ensure that workloads are manageable. Assessors have individual meetings with the training manager each month; they also attend the monthly meetings held in each nursery. Attendance at the nursery meetings enables them to pick up on any issues with practice and training and to keep up to date; this forms part of their own continuing professional development. They meet the nursery or care home manager every month, individually, to track each learner's progress, identify any training missed and provide the support needed to keep all learners on track. Progress is monitored in portfolios, on training room notice boards and on the company's website so that everyone is clear about each learner's progress.

What were the challenges?

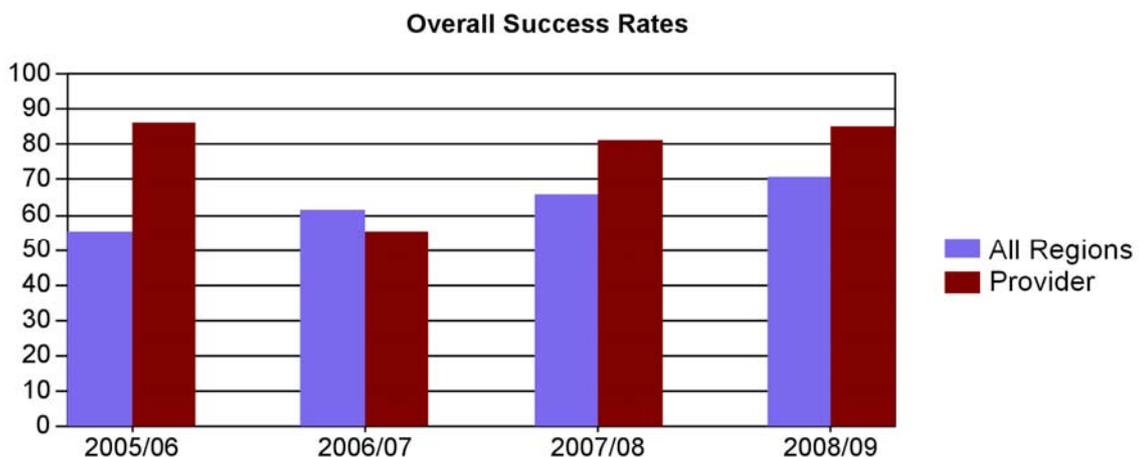
69. One of the most difficult challenges was key skills testing. When it was introduced, the tests were available only three times a year, and the results took up to two months to arrive. Online testing with instant results has helped to improve timely success rates. Aspire has both numeracy and literacy specialists in the team and continues to experiment with integrated and separate work on key skills to match learners' needs. Aspire has also increased its recruitment of men successfully and has worked with employers to ensure

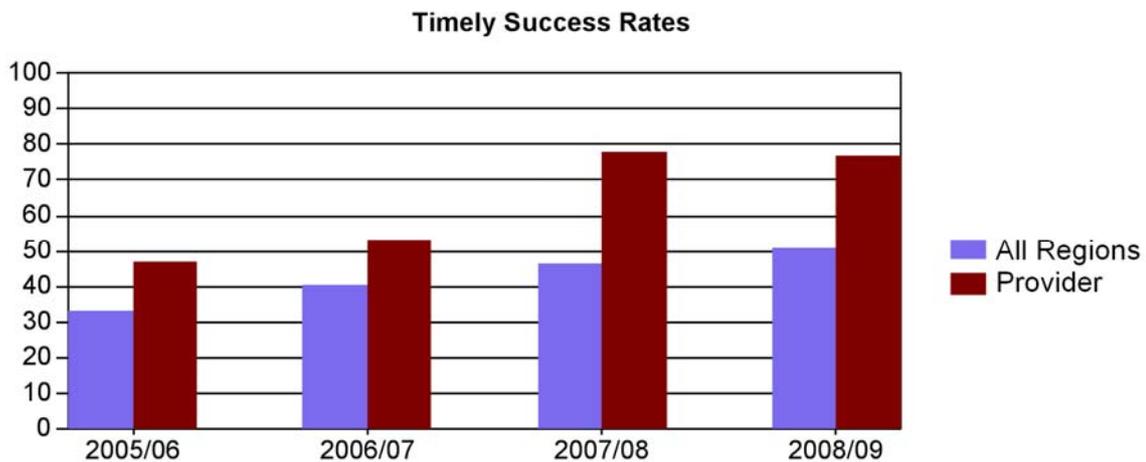
that workshops and tutorials are productive, despite the difficulty of releasing learners from work.

How are high standards maintained?

- The method of delivering training and assessment ensures that everyone works to a common standard and that training involves learners, employers and Aspire staff fully.
- Support is broad and varied to meet individual needs and responds to changes that may have an impact on learners' progress. Any potential problems are identified and tackled before they become serious, and any unforeseen emergencies are dealt with quickly.
- Good-quality, frequent communication and regular data analysis are vital in ensuring that high standards are maintained.
- All staff are highly expert, having worked in the care sector for many years; staff retention is high, and all staff are engaged in continuing professional development.

Figure 5: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?





British Gas Energy Academy

70. British Gas Energy Academy is the in-house training department responsible for the training and development of British Gas apprentices and engineers. Energy Academies are strategically located in Leeds, Leicester, Thatcham, Hamilton, Tredegar and Dartford. British Gas has a long history of training its own apprentices and has been judged to be outstanding for the quality of its training at every inspection. British Gas Engineering Academy (as it was called at the time) was last inspected in July 2007 when all main aspects were judged to be outstanding.
71. British Gas provides work-based learning courses in gas maintenance, gas installation and in customer service. All learners are employees of British Gas. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 484 funded apprentices, of whom 332 were on engineering advanced apprenticeship programmes. Approximately 15% of all learners were women and 15% had a minority ethnic background. The academy also provides training alongside funded apprentices for other company employees and, at the time of the visit, a further 164 learners were working towards similar qualifications. Learners are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of their training. This was best summarised by one learner who said, 'The training we receive is second to none; that is why we are the best.'

How work-based learning is delivered

72. Engineering apprentices follow a carefully planned programme that consists of blocks of time within an academy followed by 'field experience weeks' working alongside qualified engineers. They undertake the same sort of work activities as they have completed within the academy. This model is replicated for all the training modules that apprentices complete. It is designed to enable apprentices to gain the required knowledge, understanding and practical skills within the academy before going out and developing these skills further by

working alongside qualified engineers. Apprentices are extremely well supported and have a named academy training officer, a named mentor field engineer, a field assessor, a technical support manager, a customer operations manager and a senior training officer, all with clear roles and responsibilities and all committed to ensuring that the apprentice receives high-quality support, training and assessment. British Gas has maintained particularly high overall and timely success rates.

The provider's view of training

73. British Gas views the training of apprentices as key to its business success. It has an aging workforce and sees apprentice training as a way of meeting its future workforce requirements. It invests significantly in resources to ensure that training is of the highest standard. Business reputation is a key factor and British Gas markets its engineers as 'energy experts', so it needs to ensure that the workforce is highly skilled and up-to-date with the latest industry and technological developments. Customer satisfaction and safety are given a very high priority and, by training its own apprentices, British Gas is able to tailor training courses to ensure that engineers provide a safe and reliable service to customers. The approach to training was summarised by an academy training manager who said, 'We tailor our training to ensure our engineers can deal with any situation; they need to be experts in their field.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

74. Devising the training programme and putting in place the infrastructure for staffing and resources to support on- and off-the-job training were key factors in becoming outstanding. Recruiting and developing staff with shared values and beliefs were essential. It was necessary to develop a strong training and assessment team that shared a vision of supporting and developing apprentices. Staff support each other well and have a willingness to succeed. They have very clear roles and responsibilities and communicate extremely well with one another. The shared goal of all staff who come into contact with apprentices is to enable them to make progress and achieve qualified status by providing outstanding support and a high-quality learning experience for them.

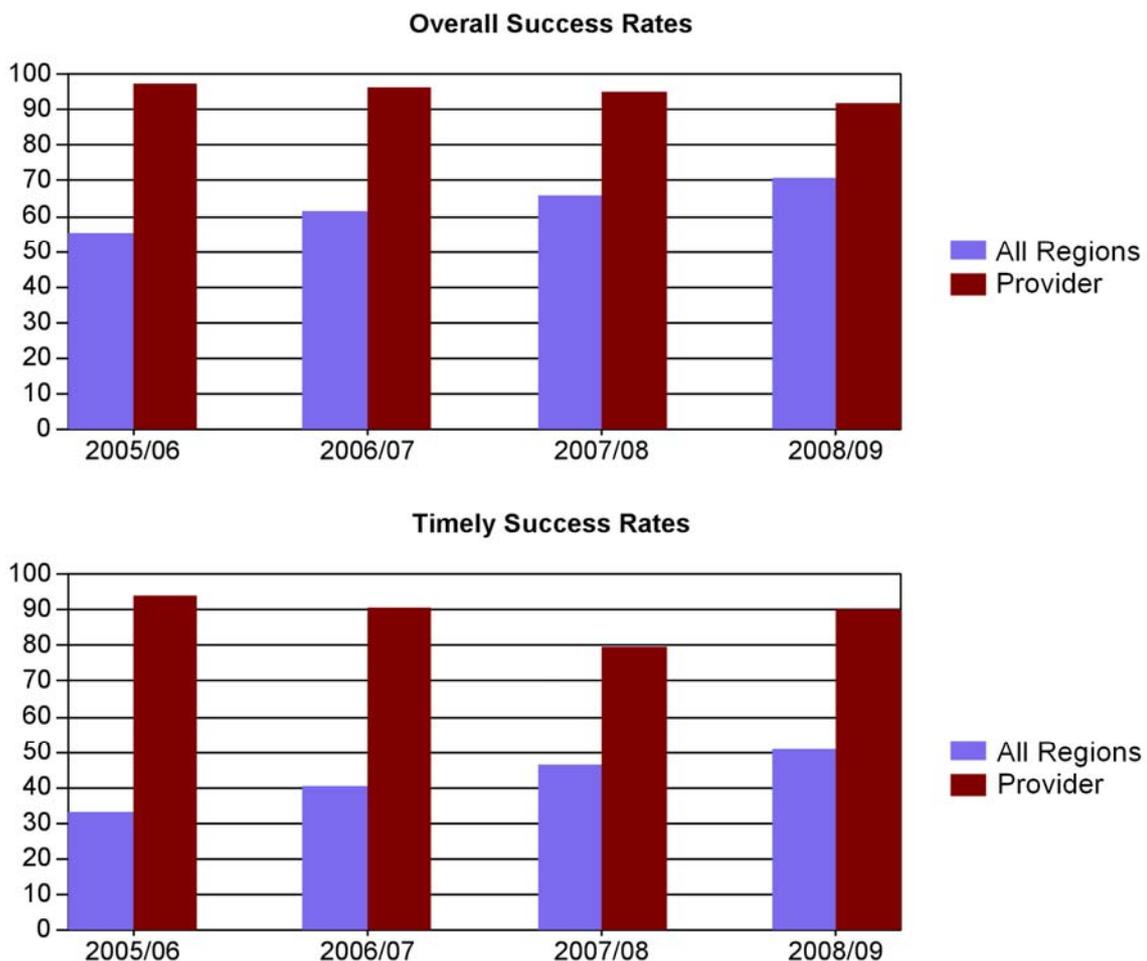
What were the challenges?

75. The main challenge has been developing the workforce to ensure that the staff involved in training and assessment provide the best possible experience for apprentices. The quality of teaching has improved as academy training staff become more experienced; many now have teaching qualifications. Field engineers are more experienced in supporting apprentices' development in the workplace. Continual feedback ensures that the training programme evolves. A wider range of activities has been added to develop learners' teamworking and communication skills alongside their technical knowledge and expertise.

How are high standards maintained?

- Comprehensive quality assurance arrangements ensure that high standards are maintained. A dedicated quality team implements a planned cycle of activity that checks all aspects of the quality of the training and assessment in every academy.
- Academy managers, staff and apprentices evaluate the quality of training, and field staff also contribute to performance evaluations.
- A self-assessment is completed that considers the views of all stakeholders. Action plans resulting from self-assessment and other quality assurance procedures are very detailed, with specific actions and targets set for improvement.

Figure 6: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Davidson Training UK

76. Davidson Training UK Limited is a private limited company, established in 1997 with a contract for work-based learning since March 2000. It provides training throughout London and beyond from the head office in Gravesend, Kent.

Davidson Training was judged inadequate in 2001, reinspected in 2002 and judged satisfactory, judged satisfactory in 2005 and outstanding in October 2009.

77. Of the 240 apprentices in 2008–09, 167 were in customer service, 44 were in retail, and 29 were in business administration; a further 70 were on advanced apprenticeships. Davidson Training focuses its recruitment of learners on their desire to learn rather than on previous qualifications and it recruits well from under-represented groups. Many learners are from deprived areas of East London and around a third of them are of minority ethnic background. If the category of 'White Other' is taken into account, to include learners of Eastern European backgrounds, the figure increases to 70%. Around two-thirds of learners are women. The large majority of learners are employed by small companies. A typical statement about the training received was:

'The training has made me look at my job from a new angle and appreciate the things I do well. It has encouraged me to develop and improve the things I don't like doing so much. I have been inspired to consider my future job prospects and would highly recommend the course to anyone who wants to improve their own job potential.'

How work-based learning is delivered

78. Davidson Training works with a range of different small employers from dental surgeries to fast food outlets. All training is delivered on employers' premises. Davidson liaises closely with each employer to assess the level of training that individual members of staff need and, wherever possible, it links delivery with the training the employer provides. Where gaps in knowledge or theory are identified, assessors work with individuals or small groups of learners to provide the appropriate training. The knowledge required for technical certificates, functional skills, and aspects of the NVQ is also delivered in this way rather than expecting learners to leave the employers' premises to attend more traditional day release training. This arrangement is well suited to the needs of the small employers that Davidson works with, as they would otherwise find it difficult to provide cover at work for whole days of training. Learners are visited regularly in the workplace where Davidson staff train, assess, review and agree action plans. A typical comment made by an employer about the training their learners had received was:

'The effect of this programme has led to a transformation in the way we do business, the focus on the customer and the professionalism of our employees.'

The provider's view of training

79. Davidson is focused on ensuring that those who provide key business support functions are appropriately trained and qualified, and have the appropriate level

of functional skills. This includes those in supervisory roles, where appropriate. A strong emphasis is placed on developing learners' confidence through support and encouragement from assessors. Becoming outstanding has helped Davidson to explore new business opportunities with employers and to take its strategic direction into areas such as team leading and management. The managing director said:

'We all have a shared passion within Davidson for helping others to learn. Our typical learners come a long way during their training, not just with qualifications but in gaining confidence and work-related skills. The volume of positive testimonies from previous learners shows that our efforts are appreciated and change lives. The vast majority of our learners progress to other training and gain promotions at work. Our assessors become a part of their lives for several years to come and keep in contact for advice.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- One key assessor works with each employer from introduction and sign-up to the learner's completion of the training. Employers liaise with one person, enabling relationships to be built successfully and for communication to be more effective in matters such as supporting training needs and resolving concerns.
- Davidson has followed a philosophy of 'growing its own' staff, taking on people with the right attributes and experience and training them to be able to deliver in the 'Davidson way'.
- Davidson has also invested in developing delivery materials and the technology necessary to use electronic portfolios, while encouraging staff through a culture of continual development.
- Functional (previously key) skills and technical certificates are given priority at the start of the programme so that they do not cause delay in completing the apprenticeship.

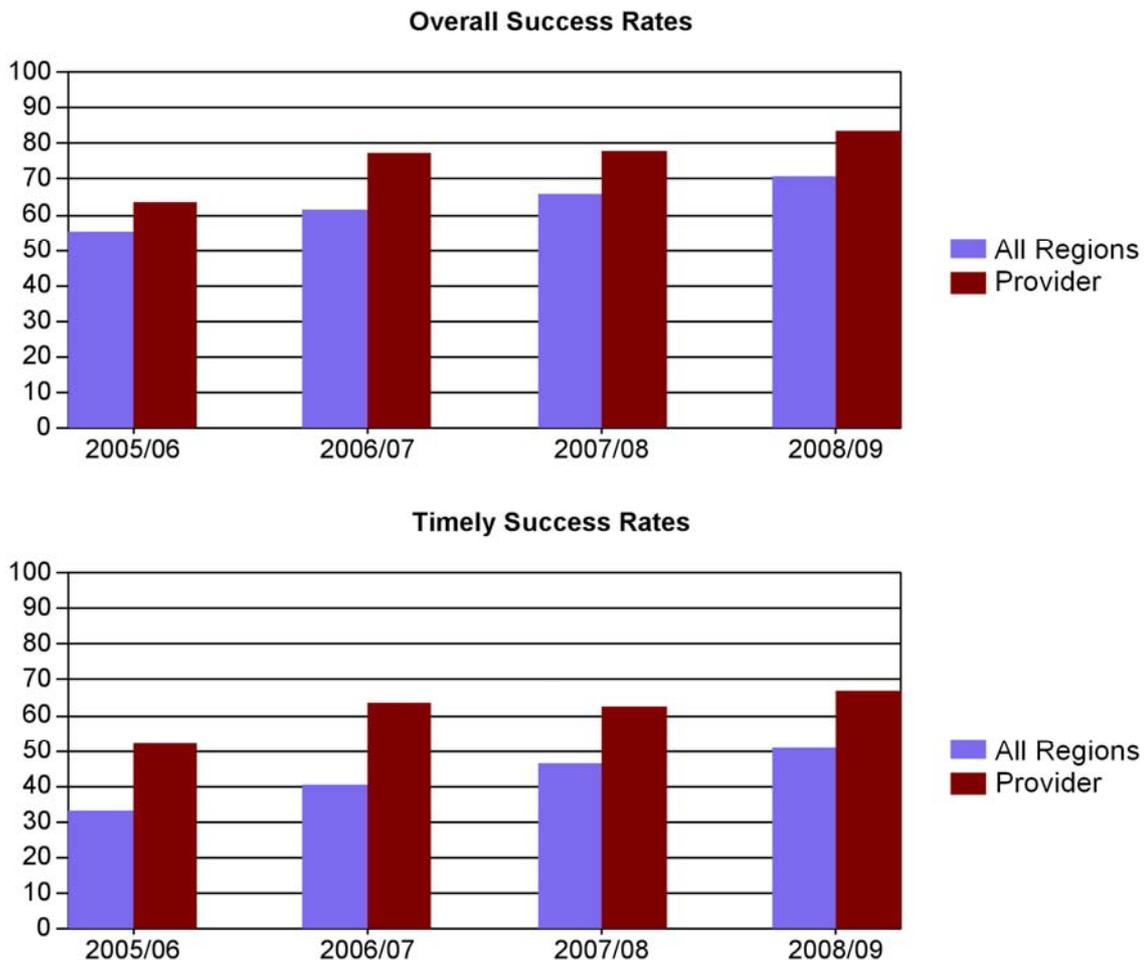
What were the challenges?

80. The key challenge in the journey to becoming a provider judged as outstanding was in improving leadership and management so that the outcomes from inspection could be comprehensively responded to. The managing director recognised the need to develop a more strategic focus to leadership and undertook training to develop these skills further, while delegating some of the more day-to-day aspects of managing the company to others. This improved the strategic focus of the company and the director encouraged those with responsibilities for operational management to identify effective ways of delivering work-based learning in the workplace, best suited to a broad range of small employers working in different types of business.

How are high standards maintained?

- A careful approach to recruiting learners means they are taken on for a period of up to six weeks to establish their commitment before progressing to the full programme.
- The close monitoring of learners' targets and progress by assessors, coupled with close monitoring of the achievement of assessors' targets by internal verifiers and managers, keeps learners on target to succeed.
- All managers, including the managing director, have a small caseload of learners. This maintains their awareness of what is involved in learning, assessment and internal verification and keeps them in touch with changes to standards and developments, such as functional skills.
- There is a strong culture of support and development throughout the company, with staff clearly excited about taking teaching qualifications and meeting new challenges.

Figure 8: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Gateshead College

81. Gateshead College started to offer work-based learning programmes in November 2002 when provision was transferred from Gateshead Council. In January 2003 the college was inspected and was awarded a satisfactory grade for its work-based learning provision. Following the inspection, governors at the college made the decision to invest significantly to improve the quality of work-based learning programmes with the stated intention of becoming the 'training provider of choice' for apprentices in the region. The college now provides work-based learning courses across the Tyne and Wear region and the number of learners continues to rise each year. In November 2009 the college was inspected again and the provision for work-based learning, together with the college provision overall, was judged to be outstanding.
82. Work-based learning programmes are offered in eight sector subject areas with the majority of the provision in engineering and construction. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 415 learners on apprenticeship programmes and a further 250 learners on advanced apprenticeships programmes. Approximately 86% of learners were men and 3% were from minority ethnic backgrounds.

How is work-based learning delivered?

83. The college has a discrete apprenticeship department. Programme managers oversee a team of NVQ assessors and work closely with them and with college lecturing staff to ensure that learners' training and assessment programmes are planned appropriately. Each learner has a named NVQ assessor who is responsible for managing and assessing them throughout the programme. This includes assessment, both at the college and on employers' premises, liaison with employers and the completion of learner reviews. College lecturing staff are responsible for teaching the technical certificate requirements of the apprenticeship framework. Learners attend college for their off-the-job training, on day release or block release, depending on the type of course and their employer's requirements.

The provider's view of training

84. The college is well known for its links with employers and further engagement in the provision of work-based learning was seen as a way of strengthening these links. Staff and governors at the college believe firmly in the value of vocational learning and are committed to developing apprenticeships, believing that the apprentices of today become the managers and leaders of tomorrow. The college's approach to training was summarised by the senior manager responsible for work-based learning programmes who said:

'We are committed to making our apprentices the best they can be by offering as broad a range of experiences as possible. We like to ensure our apprentices are equipped with the skills and knowledge that employers want.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- The college quickly established a clearly defined management structure and recruited well-qualified staff who were conversant with current industry practices and who would relate well to employers. A key to the staffing structure was the role of the in-house assessors who act as the one point of contact for an apprentice and the employer.
- High-quality training resources in purpose-built accommodation benefit learners and employers considerably. Training facilities have benefited from significant investment and, in many of the engineering, motor vehicle and construction workshops, the very latest industry technology is available to learners for training and assessment activities.
- Programmes are managed carefully and include embedding the delivery of key skills in the first year of training, as well as the inclusion of qualifications that add value to the learning experience.
- The rigorous tracking and monitoring of all aspects of the learners' programmes were essential in ensuring success.

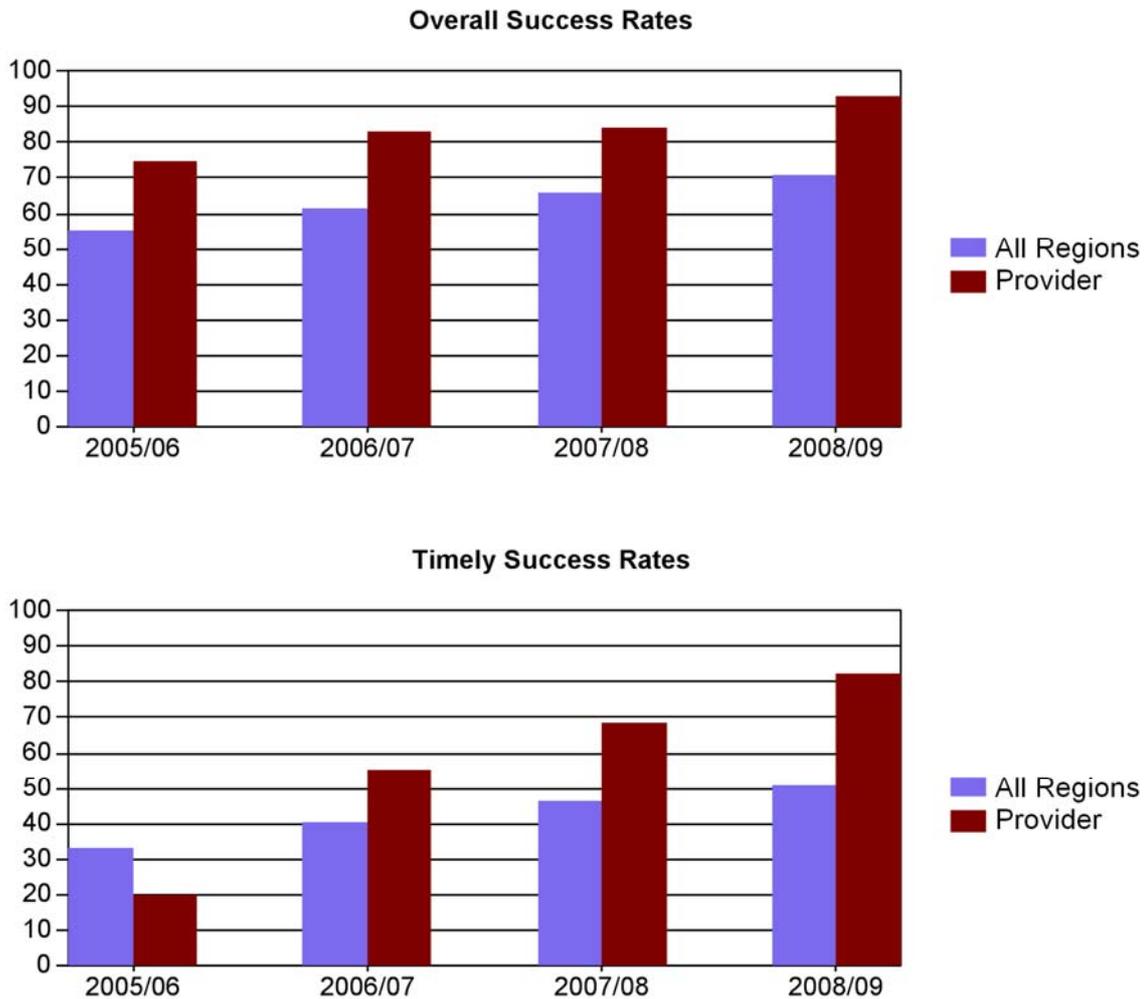
What were the challenges?

85. Recruiting and developing staff with the right level of skills, knowledge and expertise was a time consuming task. The development of rigorous quality assurance arrangements and implementing a dedicated management information system were also essential to enable the monitoring and improvement of provision. The most significant challenge in terms of the learners was in getting them to appreciate the relevance and benefits of key skill qualifications.

How are high standards maintained?

- All aspects of the work-based learning programmes are quality assured and fully evaluated by managers, staff, learners and employers.
- The views of learners and employers are actively sought; learners and employers contribute to evaluating programmes and suggest any improvements that may be required.
- Frequent management meetings are used to discuss strategic and operational issues and quarterly business reviews monitor progress against targets and business plans.

Figure 9: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Hospitality Training Partnership

86. Hospitality Training Partnership (HTP) was founded in 2000 on the Isle of Wight. It offers apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and Train to Gain in all areas of hospitality, management, retail, customer service, business administration, childcare and fire operations; also Entry to Employment provision, programmes for offenders, those at risk of re-offending and young mothers. In 2005 HTP expanded to offer programmes in Hampshire and Sussex. The main office in Newport is the centre for the NVQ and apprenticeship programmes; it is also the centre for the company's management and administration. HTP owns a hotel in East Cowes which is managed as a commercial operation and used to offer opportunities for training and assessment to HTP learners. HTP was judged good in 2004 and outstanding in November 2008.

87. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 989 learners following apprenticeship programmes, the largest area being in hospitality and catering. Over 370 older learners are on NVQ 2 and 3 programmes funded through Train to Gain. A typical comment from a learner was:

'My training consultant gives me fantastic support and help. Her feedback on my progress means that I am on track to finish early. I have learnt such a lot in a short time and want to progress to higher qualifications.'

How work-based learning is delivered

88. Learners are able to start their programme at any time during the year. Each learner has one training consultant who does everything with the learner except for off-the-job training. Some employers have their own qualified assessors who work closely with HTP training consultants. Learners have good training resources and attend HTP centres, when required, for training. Many learners take advantage of the reduced price bus passes to attend work and training; these were negotiated by HTP to tackle concerns raised about the high cost of public transport on the Isle of Wight.

The provider's view of training

89. After completing her own training, the owner and Chief Executive of HTP came back to the island and worked in the hospitality industry. In 1997 she was asked to set up New Deal training for the local funding body. She felt that there was a gap in the market for an effective provider of hospitality training and saw the potential to have an employer-led contract through her partnership in a hotel. From her own experience of industry, she knew the impact that good training has on successful business and understands the crucial role that partnership working plays in successful delivery, whether with employers, schools, other providers or the local authority.

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- HTP developed initial advice and guidance so that prospective learners had as much information as possible to make the right decision about the area in which they wanted to train.
- Initial assessment was developed not only to identify the areas where support for literacy and numeracy was needed but also to include previous experience and the range of work with the employer. Any gaps in meeting framework requirements were then identified and solutions found.
- HTP developed workshops to deliver theory and resources to be used at times that were convenient for learners. Online testing of theory and key skills was introduced successfully and is now the first choice of learners.
- Staff training and observation helped to make progress reviews effective in keeping HTP staff, learners and employers fully involved in maintaining

learner progress. The planning of assessment is thorough and well-understood by learners and their employers.

- There are monthly reports to training managers and a focus on looking three months ahead, enabling the right support to be put in place so that learners finish their qualifications on time.
- HTP's own hotel and restaurant provide opportunities for training. Learners are able to work across a range of catering jobs in a supportive learning environment. This has been particularly useful in helping learners who have lost their jobs to finish their training and achieve their qualification.

What were the challenges?

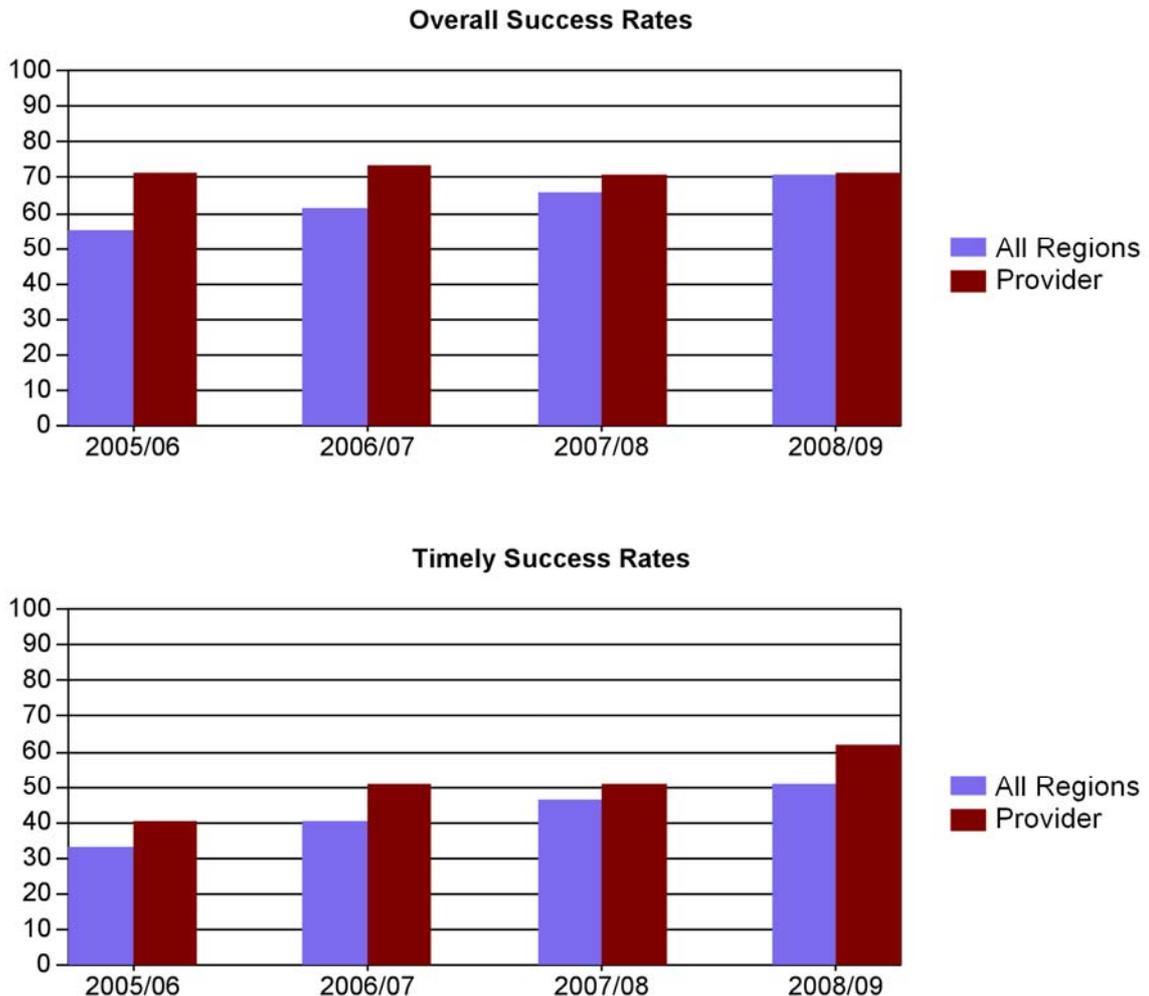
90. The success of HTP is very firmly rooted in the quality of its staff and low turnover. This is very much a story of 'grow your own'. Staff are recruited for their strong industrial experience and a desire to be involved in training, supported by experienced staff as mentors. Taking teaching qualifications is the norm at HTP and professional skills are maintained through courses and industrial placements. HTP offers its own teaching qualifications and assessor awards, for its own staff and employers.
91. The expansion of provision to the mainland and into other areas of learning was a problem at first because recruiting new staff did not allow the same quality of provision to be easily replicated. Internal training eventually had a positive impact but it took time. The way in which training is delivered successfully on the island through management, quality procedures and support for staff is now being replicated in the delivery seen on the mainland. Initial problems in closing the gap between timely and overall success rates were overcome by more effective planning and monitoring of delivery.

How are high standards maintained?

- HTP belongs to a number of provider networks and is keen both to share its own good practice and to learn from others.
- HTP has a strong focus on 'you said – we did' when gathering feedback, so that action is taken on anything that needs improving and those making comments know that they have been listened to.
- There is a strong focus on collecting the right data to be able to know how learners and their assessors are performing.
- Training is observed both on- and off-the-job so that good practice is identified and shared, with additional support being provided for less experienced trainers.
- A self-assessment week for staff in September involves the whole company, using mixed teams to get an internal 'external' view of different areas. Mini

self-assessment reports are shared so that all staff feel that they understand what HTP is about.

Figure 10: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Intraining

92. The Intraining Group (Intraining) was established as a division of the Newcastle College Group (NCG) in March 2008. It was formed from separate providers who had gone into administration. The head office is in Sheffield and 100 centres support its main activities in employability training and work-based learning. Intraining was inspected for the first time in July 2009 and was judged to be outstanding. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 9,440 learners, around three quarters of whom were following apprenticeship programmes in business and administration, with the remainder following programmes in health and care, engineering and manufacturing technologies, information and communication technology (ICT), leisure, travel and tourism, and in the retail and commercial enterprise sector. A further 255 Train to Gain learners were enrolled on Skills for Life courses. Around two thirds of learners

were women and around one in 10 were from minority ethnic backgrounds. A typical comment from a learner was:

'I have developed new skills and have much more confidence about what I am doing at work.'

How work-based learning is delivered

93. Intraining works with a wide range of employers and uses the skills of its team of training assessors so that learners' supervisors and managers are involved in the process of learning. This ensures that employers are fully aware of the requirements of each qualification and how they can best support their employees to achieve their qualification within the time agreed. Significant investment across the company into IT infrastructure has enabled it to introduce consistent approaches to e-portfolios.

The provider's view of training

94. Intraining's focus is on improving the employability of its learners. It supports a high number of learners aged 14 to 19 while also providing training for potentially vulnerable learners such as ex-offenders and those receiving incapacity benefit. Intraining's detailed analysis of local labour market information is used to identify skills shortages and to check these against the identified skills of employees who may have come from, or still be working in, declining industries. It works particularly closely with a wide range of small local and large national employers to help unemployed people by identifying barriers to work, supporting them to overcome them, developing their skills and preparing them for recruitment and selection processes.

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- The high quality of leadership and expertise of the executive management group within the NCG were critical factors. Along with other key stakeholders, managers were actively involved in planning improvements, supporting their implementation and resolving problems.
- Highly developed management information systems – 'one version of the truth' – made it easier for trainers, assessors and internal verifiers to ensure that their learners met qualification requirements and completed their qualifications in the scheduled time.
- Implementing e-portfolios across the organisation resulted in the use of a wider range of assessment methods in supporting learners' progress and meeting employers' needs.
- Divisional and personal performance targets were used extensively and applied to the work of subcontractors.
- Intraining is particularly responsive and flexible in meeting employers' needs with exceptional strategies to involve employers in learning.

- Staff are kept fully up to date with developments in the curriculum, such as developing models for implementing functional skills to replace key skills.
- The promotion of equality measures through a single equality scheme is strong. At the time of the visit, 30% of learners came from disadvantaged wards.

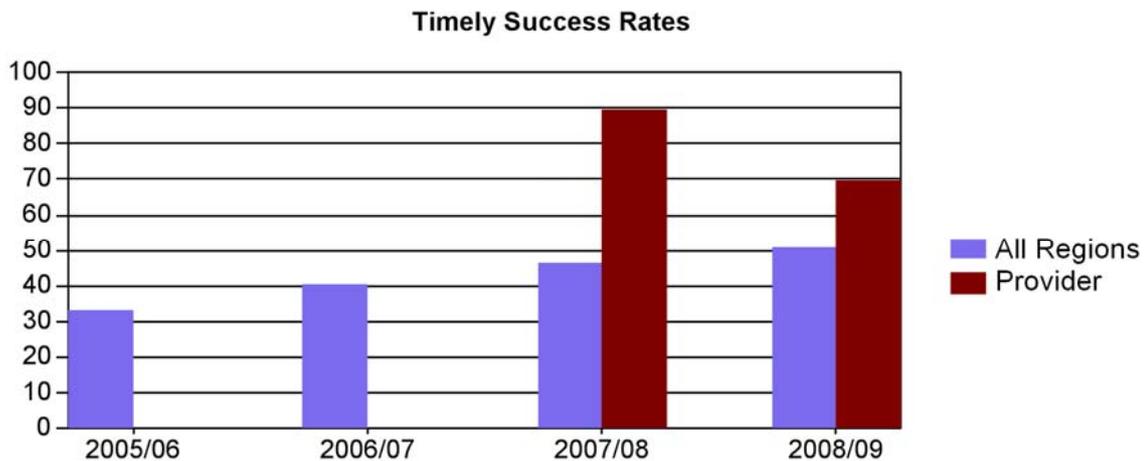
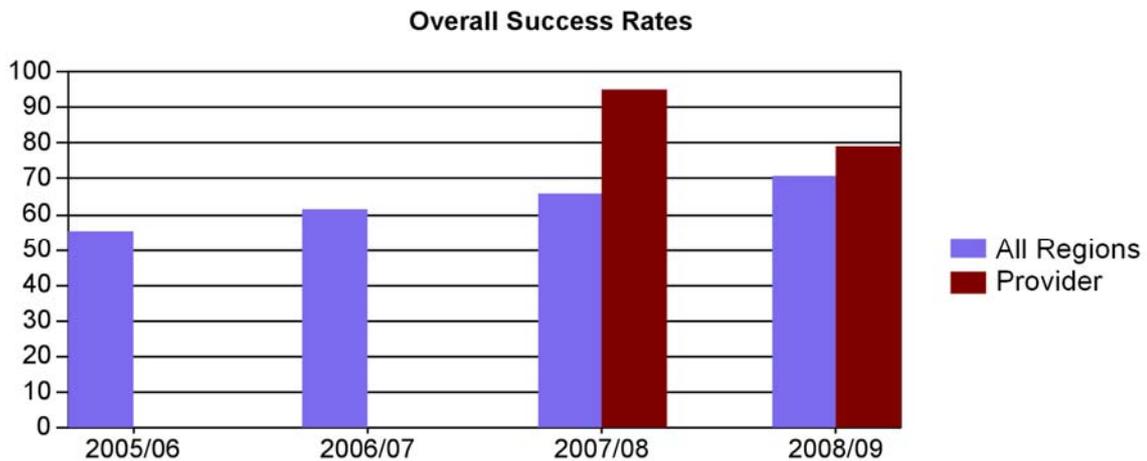
What were the challenges?

95. One of the major challenges concerned the need to rationalise the number of disparate organisations with different management systems while developing and establishing a single, coherent organisational approach. Previously, staff had not felt as though they were part of a single organisation. As the new model evolved, it had a profound and positive impact on the motivation of staff. Staff felt able to give more and to achieve more highly. A strong emphasis was placed on establishing a secure system for maintaining the confidential records of staff and learners. The availability of accurate and timely data contributed considerably to the good planning and directing of business operations.

How are high standards maintained?

- The management team identifies clear priorities to bring about improvement and reports regularly to senior executives at NCG.
- Performance monitoring and management are high quality. Managers are required to report against a clear set of key performance indicators and on progress towards achieving targets. All areas of the organisation report against the same criteria in monthly reports to the senior management team.
- The sharing of good practice across Intraining is exemplary. Intraining is a large and complex organisation which, before the acquisition by NCG, consisted of a group of disparate providers with very few links and little consistency across them. The best practice from NCG has been shared with Intraining very effectively.
- Staff use online and interactive training effectively, and individual coaching supports their needs well.
- Self-assessment is inclusive and well-established. It incorporates the views of staff, learners and employers as part of the formal quality reviews, as well as outcomes from quality systems such as the observation of teaching and learning.

Figure 11: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Skillnet

96. Skillnet is an independent training provider based in Watford but supplying work-based learning throughout the UK. Founded as a small provider in 1999, it was taken over by its two shareholders in 2006 and now has more than 2,000 learners aged from 14 upwards. Skillnet was judged satisfactory in 2002 and 2005 and outstanding in January 2010. Skillnet specialises in customised automotive engineering apprenticeships for large manufacturers and independent dealerships. As well as its own centres in Watford and Ruislip, it trains apprentices in manufacturers' premises, such as the Ford college in Daventry. At the time of the visit for this survey, three quarters of the learners were apprentices within manufacturers' franchised networks including Ford, Kia, DAF Trucks and Scania. The rest worked in small- and medium-sized independent garages. Two thirds of apprentices were under 18 years of age and almost 4% were women. In London and the South East, 141 adults were

on NVQ programmes funded through Train to Gain, together with a further 27 programme-led apprentices. A typical comment from a learner was:

'I like being treated as an adult and working in a professional environment.'

How work-based learning is delivered

97. Learners attend training on block release at Skillnet's own centres in Eastcote and Watford, the Ford college in Daventry, the Scania centre in Loughborough, City of Bristol DAF Trucks Academy and self-contained college centres. Manufacturer-specific centres have state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment and current vehicles from the manufacturer's range. Workshops are well equipped with excellent technical equipment to challenge learners' fault-finding skills. Excellent classroom IT facilities enable learners to access online diagnostic software and workshop manuals. Learners complete a wide range of tasks at work to develop their practical skills. Skillnet understands how important the brand is for large companies. It has customised arrangements for each manufacturer. While making sure that it delivers the basic framework needed for an apprenticeship, every training scheme is slightly different.

The provider's view of training

98. Skillnet's director said:

'Our aim is to professionalise the motor trade. We offer a progression path for all ages and constantly try to increase the range of experiences open to learners. Our approach is that everyone is our partner in making sure that happens.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

99. The directors set out a clear three-year plan when they acquired the business. This included not only the key contracts to expand the business but it also identified the quality standards they needed to achieve. The plan set out seven key areas of excellence for the business: very high achievement rates; strong leadership and management; well-trained staff; facilities and equipment; outstanding relationships with customers; a total quality focus; and responsiveness.
100. The directors and staff share an expectation of high and continually improving standards in all they do. When asked what were the key things they did to become outstanding, the director said, 'We worked very hard at everything.' The organisation does not see any single aspect of what it does as critical: everything is critical and everything needs to be done well. That said, three aspects of the organisation are clearly evident: a strong commitment to, and

robust systems for, achieving high standards; exceptional relationships with customers; and a commitment to staff and their development.

101. Skillnet is exceptionally responsive to employers' needs and learners' aspirations. The range and content of programmes are closely matched to automotive technological advances, both in manufacturer-led and independent programmes. Employers engage actively in planning learning and assessment. Manufacturer-led programmes have clear progression routes between the NVQ and master technician modules, which benefit employers considerably. All the staff have specialist knowledge of the brands they support. Regular updates from the manufacturers make sure that the knowledge of staff is kept up-to-date and that learners get an excellent package: that is, very good basic training is combined with the latest manufacturer units and specialist certification in very well-equipped workshops.

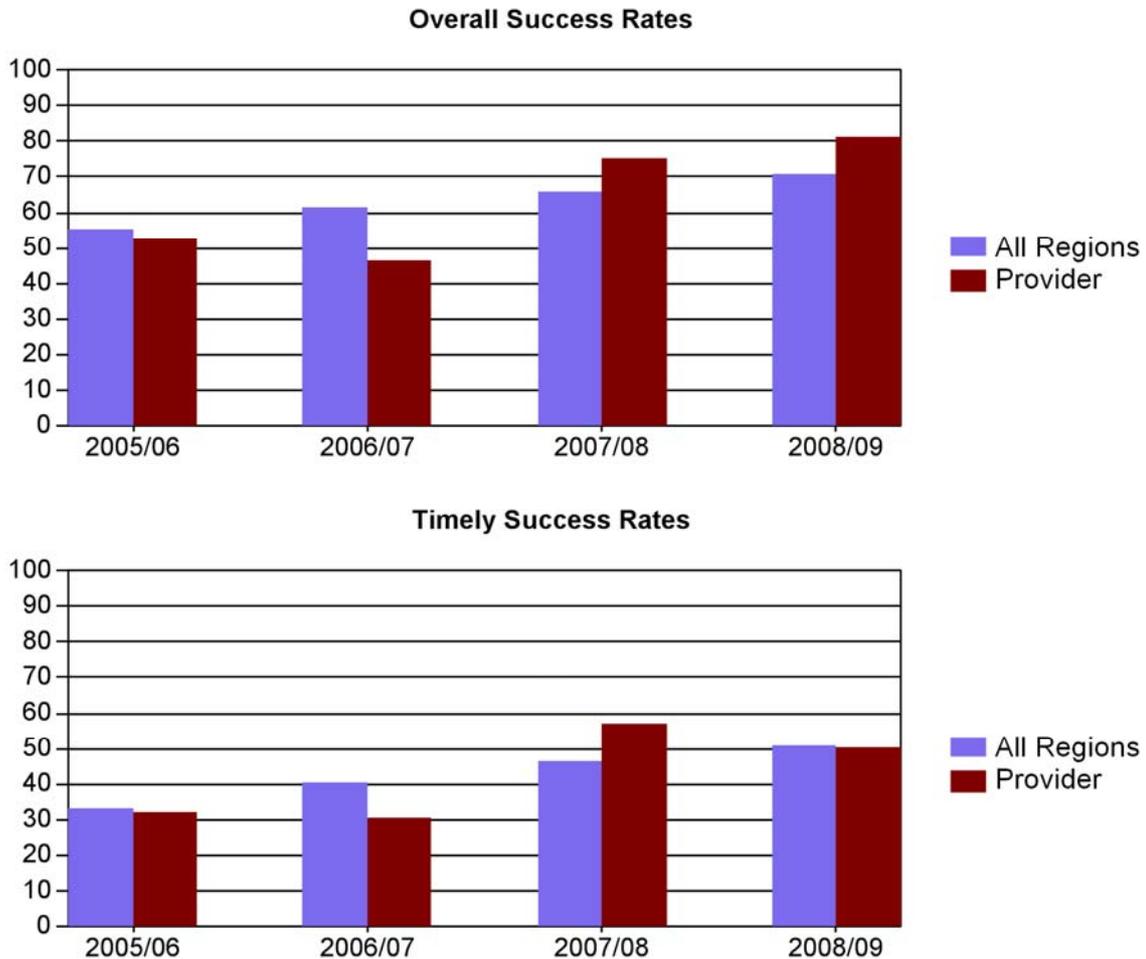
What were the challenges?

102. When the directors took over the business, it had 270 learners and operated in London and Hertfordshire. Inspection had repeatedly judged it to be satisfactory. 'When we bought the business in 2006, we had a clear business plan,' Skillnet's Chief Executive said. 'We knew it wouldn't be easy, but we were determined to win the bids for DAF, Ford and Scania and make them work.' In 2008, Skillnet took over 800 apprentices from another provider with very low success rates. Many were making slow or little progress. As one of the directors commented, 'The apprenticeship programmes were broken – many subcontracted colleges had been very worried when the previous provider went into administration.' The directors planned carefully and effectively. Skillnet's rapid yet sustainably phased growth has been accomplished without compromising its excellent quality, with considerably improved success rates. The company structure is very clear and transparent, with a discrete, well-defined role for each section, focusing on a particular manufacturer.

How are high standards maintained?

Skillnet operates a detailed and comprehensive total quality system consisting of key learner processes and quality standards. These are reviewed routinely and kept up to date. Skillnet's systems look comprehensive, but they would not work without the personal commitment of their staff who are available day and night.

Figure 12: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Training Services 2000

103. Training Services 2000 Limited (TS2000) is a private limited company established in October 2000. Based in Derby, it provides work-based learning in engineering, business administration, information technology and customer service. It is owned and managed by four directors. In addition to apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships, TS2000 provides a Young Apprenticeship programme in engineering for school pupils aged from 14 to 16. A new training centre was opened in June 2010. TS2000 has taken several years and three full inspections to move from satisfactory to good and was judged to be outstanding at its inspection in November 2009.

104. TS2000 provides apprenticeship training in engineering for about 100 learners and in business administration for about 60 learners. At the time of the visit for this survey, a further 25 learners were following NVQs in engineering through Train to Gain. Approximately 80% of learners were men and 7% were from a minority ethnic group. Most learners were employed by local companies, most of whom were small- and medium-sized enterprises. Engineering apprentices

work at a wide variety of local companies involved in aerospace, railway, electrical and manufacturing industries.

105. To help more learners and employers engage with apprenticeships, TS2000 operates a small programme-led apprenticeship scheme where learners are paid a training allowance by TS2000 until they find an employer. During this time the learners attend TS2000's training centre for two days each week and undertake periods of work experience. Learners are usually found full employment opportunities with a local company within a few weeks of starting their programme, although some remain on the programme for up to six months. A typical learner comment was:

'I particularly like the four-monthly welfare reviews and monthly progress reviews, they keep me focused and on track.'

How work-based learning is delivered

106. Engineering apprentices attend weekly off-the-job training either at TS2000's own training centre or at a local college. Business administration apprentices attend TS2000's training centre for off-the-job training, usually one day each week. TS2000's approach to providing off-the-job training for apprentices is highly flexible and can accommodate a variety of attendance patterns if the traditional model of one day a week does not fit in with what employers need. Training in the workplace is provided by employers. Assessors visit apprentices in the workplace every four to six weeks.

The provider's view of training

107. The director of TS2000 said:

'Our philosophy is to deliver high-quality training and provide total customer satisfaction – and we take great pride in being instrumental in developing the skills and employability of young people within Derby City centre and the surrounding areas. Young people on apprenticeships are the future of British industry. We believe that, by delivering high-quality training and giving learners the individual support they need throughout their programme, we are making a huge contribution to both their personal and career development.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- Staff are very aware that close monitoring and high levels of support are critical in helping learners to succeed. A member of staff visits each learner on their first week at work, establishing a bond between the learner and TS2000. Visits to the workplace are undertaken regularly for observations, checking progress and agreeing new targets.
- Every six months TS2000 produces a comprehensive progress report on each learner. In addition, a welfare officer visits all learners in their

workplaces every three to four months to review all aspects of the learners' experiences in detail.

- Learners say that one of the key strengths of the organisation is the high level of support that they receive from all staff. During off-the-job training, in addition to their group work, each learner receives a one-to-one session.
- The company works closely with employers to ensure that their needs and the needs of the learners are met. Learners are closely matched with employers from the start.
- Attendance patterns for training are negotiated to ensure the best fit for both the learner and the employer without compromising standards. Despite the flexible and accommodating approach to employers, TS2000 is not afraid to refuse to work with employers who cannot provide the required standard of training.

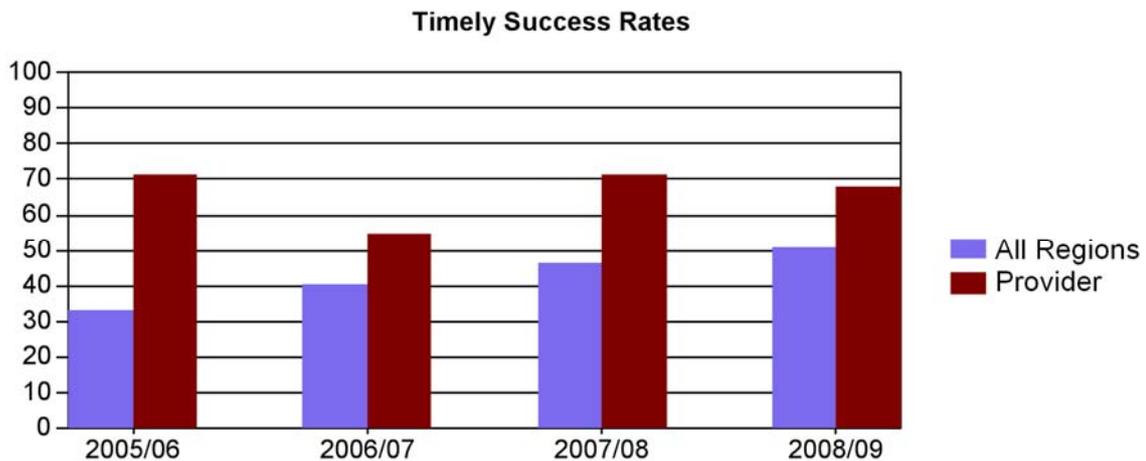
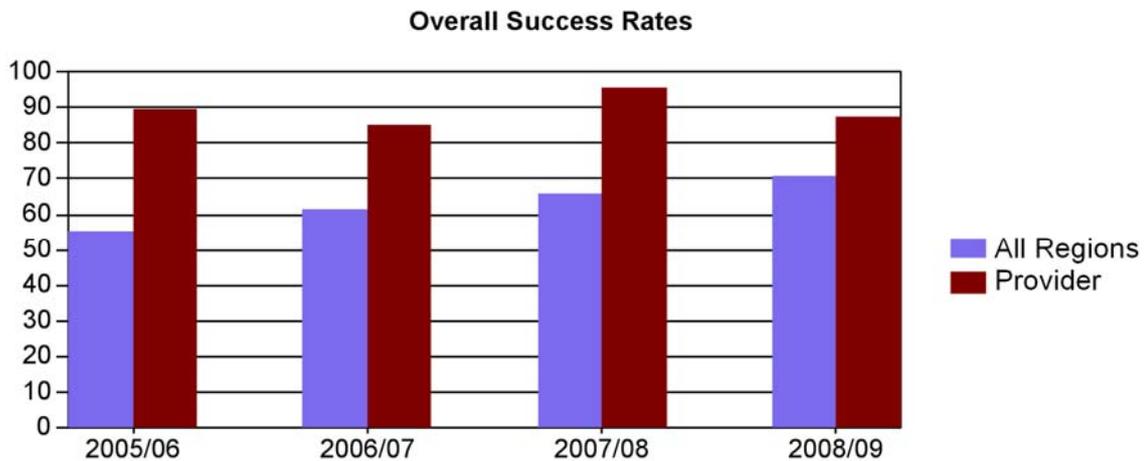
What were the challenges?

108. Following the disappointing outcome of their first inspection, managers at TS2000 completely rewrote their policies and procedures. Their response was not only to want to be the best, but to have systems to prove it. This was not just to prove to inspectors how good the company was, but to make sure that it really did understand its strengths and where improvements were needed. Frequent and detailed internal audits ensured that procedures were followed and remained relevant and workable.

How are high standards maintained?

- The company has recently opened a new engineering training centre to provide high-quality off-the-job training. Although open for only a few months so far, the new facilities have had a positive impact already. From June 2010, the second phase of the new centre provides modern training facilities for business administration learners and new offices for staff. This enables the company to have more control over the quality of off-the-job training and to offer more flexibility to employers and learners, including roll-on, roll-off programmes.
- TS2000 invests significantly in developing its staff. Staff are well-qualified and continue to keep their technical skills up to date. All staff, including the directors, engage in extensive development activities. This is reflected in the learners' views that they are well taught by experienced and knowledgeable staff.
- The company continues to use very effective quality improvement arrangements. The directors have a very thorough understanding of the company's strengths and areas to improve further. All staff share an understanding of where improvements can be made and are determined to maintain standards and improve further.

Figure 13: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Warwickshire College

109. Warwickshire College is one of the largest general further education colleges in the country. It employs 2,000 staff, has 25,000 enrolled learners and a budget turnover of more than £53 million. It operates on six separate campuses including the Trident Technology and Business Centre in Leamington Spa, which serves as the base for the majority of work-based learning and employer-related activities. Warwickshire College runs apprenticeship programmes in partnership with local, regional and nationally based employers. National employers include: AGCO Dealerships (formerly Massey Ferguson), Cable & Wireless, Connaught, Jaguar Land Rover, ROMEK, and Telent (formerly Marconi). A wide range of apprenticeships is offered in over 30 occupational areas. The delivery of NVQs in the workplace has been developed using Train to Gain funding and through partnership working. The college now offers over 33 NVQs at Levels 2 and 3. The employer base has expanded to include companies from both the public and private sector across a full range of

occupational areas. In March 2008, the college was judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness and also for its work-based learning provision.

110. At the time of the visit for this survey, there were 921 learners on apprenticeship programmes. Over half these learners were in engineering and manufacturing technologies with larger groups also in construction, and agriculture and horticulture. Approximately three quarters of the learners were men. In addition, there were 1,724 Train to Gain learners, mainly in business administration, health and care, engineering and manufacturing, and retail. Half were women. A typical comment from a learner was:

'I chose the apprenticeship route because I was just so interested in business, having studied it at AS level. I was intending to complete my A-levels, but when a full-time job came up at Sandvik, it was too good an opportunity to miss. Because of my qualifications, I was able to do my NVQ at Levels 2 and 3 quickly and I'm now doing an HNC on day release.'

How work-based learning is delivered

111. The college is organised into four faculties; vocational programme areas operate within each faculty. Each programme area offers a comprehensive range of programmes, extending from provision for young people aged from 14 to 16 in collaboration with schools through to higher education programmes. Work-based learning is one strand in this range. The programmes, designed to respond to the needs of employers, are managed within each programme area. Knowledge-based qualifications, such as technical certificates and key skills, are offered on day release, block release, full-time or part-time. Workshops, one-to-one coaching, and assessment activities take place in the workplace.
112. Delivery and assessment teams include lecturers, tutors, assessors, internal verifiers, delivery managers, curriculum leaders, and industrial training officers. Their work is supported by staff from departments that work across the college in areas such as quality improvement, admissions and learning support. An employer services department is responsible for coordinating all employer-responsive funded work. The team processes data on funding claims, produces data on learners and employers, and coordinates the sharing of information and good practice across the college.

The provider's view on training

113. A primary objective for the college is the quality of support that it gives to 'professionalising the workforce'. It seeks to equip young people and adults with the skills for productive, sustainable and fulfilling employment and to ensure that employers have the right skills for their businesses to succeed, so that they are able to respond to changing needs and new challenges. This was a key feature of the college's strategy to increase its engagement activities with

local and national employers and to contribute locally and nationally to economic development.

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- The rigorous application of six-weekly reviews for work-based learners has resulted in stringent monitoring of their progress and early identification of any learners at risk of falling behind in their studies. This focus has been instrumental in improving timely success rates considerably.
- Explicit and precise entry criteria were used to ensure that all learners had the basic skills and potential to achieve their target qualifications. Standardised initial interviews and a vocationally specific induction were introduced.
- Staff involved in managing or supporting work-based learning were well-qualified vocationally and had current knowledge of the sector.
- Work-based learners are fully integrated into the diverse college community and have full access to all support services, such as college counsellors, and specialists in equality, safeguarding, and health and safety.
- The college gives a high priority to ensuring that employers are committed strongly to supporting the success of their work-based learners before it agrees to work with them.

What were the challenges?

114. One of the most important challenges was overcoming the initial reluctance of some staff to identify their at-risk learners. When everyone took responsibility for all learners, individual staff no longer felt threatened if they identified a learner as needing extra help to achieve within the planned time and did not feel that this reflected badly on their own performance. The close monitoring of progress through six-weekly reviews of individual's progress was very successful. It provided staff with information about what additional intervention or support was needed.
115. Skills audits of employers were conducted. These identified business needs and ensured that apprentices had access to the required work and support from employers so that they had the best chance of success. All the college staff who worked with employers had additional training so that they had a thorough understanding of the requirements of work-based learning

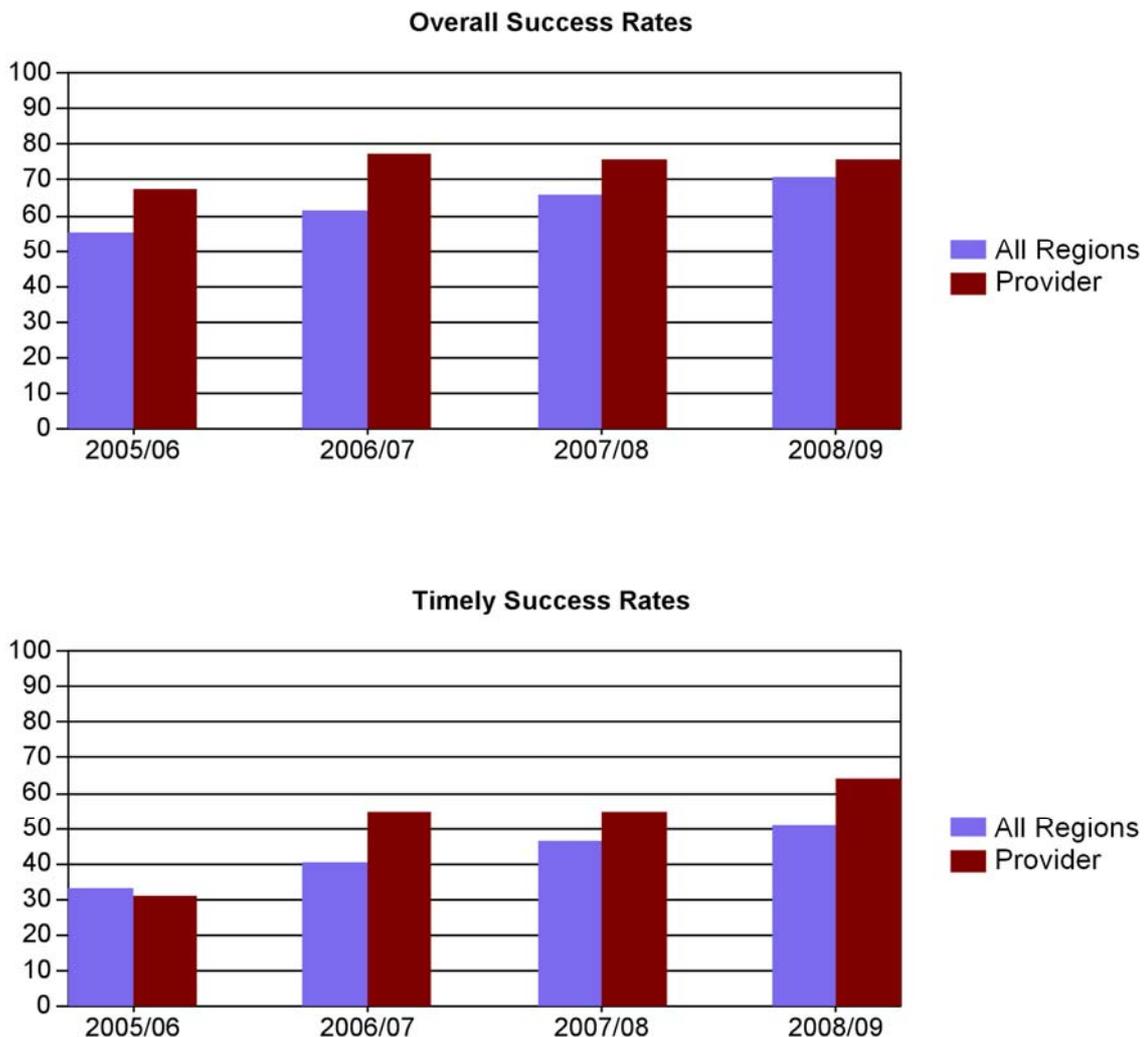
How are high standards maintained?

- The reliable and accurate data on learners' progress are invaluable in keeping staff informed regularly.
- There is thoughtful matching of programmes to the needs of employers who require supported training to meet their business needs. A careful scrutiny takes place of the on-the-job skills that employers are able to offer to

ensure that, when apprentices are placed there, they are able to cover the full range of an NVQ and to achieve an apprenticeship framework. Where there are gaps, additional alternative arrangements are made with other employers.

- The work-based learning programmes are able to draw on the best practice applied to other parts of the college’s work with learners and undergo the same rigorous quality assurance procedures such as observation and self-assessment.

Figure 14: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?



Zenos

116. Zenos is based in the Cotswold village of Aynho, near Banbury. The company was founded in 2001 by its present chairman and executive director as a private limited company to provide support for IT systems and software development training. In 2008 Zenos became part of the Melorio PLC Group.

Strategic and operational aspects of the company are managed through a board of directors. Day-to-day running of the company is the responsibility of a senior management team, which includes regional training managers. Starting with only 25 learners, the company is now national. Zenos has expanded rapidly over the past two years, increasing the number of its training centres (called regional academies) from 12 to 31 to give national coverage from Newcastle to Southampton. Zenos was judged satisfactory in 2003 and outstanding in June 2008.

117. At the time of the visit for this survey, Zenos had over 1,700 learners involved in ICT training on work-based and programme-led academy-based programmes, of which around 1,500 were from 16 to 18 years of age. Around 85% of learners were men and over a quarter were from minority ethnic groups. Demand for academy places is over six times the number of places available. Rather than selecting solely by academic ability, Zenos places importance on selecting learners who demonstrate the necessary interests, motivation, passion and aptitudes for working within the IT industry. A typical learner's comment was:

'When I attended college I regarded it as a progression, but Zenos provided me with a gateway to a career. Training was of high quality, providing close monitoring of my performance, progress, behaviour, and attitudes and this transformed me as a person. The training gave me a complete solution for gaining relevant qualifications and being made job-ready, and receiving advice and support into employment.'

How work-based learning is delivered

118. Learning is provided nationally, either through Zenos's 31 academies or as work-based learning through its partnerships with a range of large corporate organisations, such as Fujitsu, Xerox and Hewlett Packard. Zenos provides learners with a full set of skills needed to establish a career within the IT industry. Training programmes contain a high level of individual learning support, including the use of specialist tutors for literacy, language and numeracy.
119. For academy learners, two annual cohorts start their training in March and September. The intensive five-month programme-led course leads to an advanced apprenticeship in IT and industry-recognised qualifications, such as Microsoft Certified Desktop Support technician. Programmes include a high element of real-work simulation as well as work placements so that learners can gain the skills, knowledge and experience that the industry requires. Academy learners are required to conform to strict dress codes, presenting a smart appearance, and maintain regular and punctual attendance at learning sessions. Employed learners follow the same programmes, although the mode of delivery is adapted to be compatible with work commitments. They receive monthly visits by assessors at work to complete and plan assessment and

receive learning support. The training programme lasts, typically, from 14 to 16 months. This includes six, one-week, off-the-job training blocks, when employed learners attend the academies.

The provider's view on training

120. Zenos's rationale for the development of its work-related provision is based on the experience of its directors of working within the industry and understanding its needs. This is coupled with the analysis of skills needs in national reports such as those of the Institute of IT Training. Research by Zenos indicates that an estimated 140,000 new job roles are created within the IT industry each year; many of these are filled by overseas workers because of skills shortages in the UK workforce. Zenos's research indicated that very few young people were being employed by the major IT companies. Zenos's managing director said:

'Trainees leaving our academies are confident and industry-ready because they understand their job roles and customers' needs. Our trainees have been moulded by our training to acquire the work ethic required by the industry. They convey the right impression to customers, which is valued by employers and many IT large companies return to Zenos to employ our trainees on completion of training.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- The delivery of a quality training service through a clear company vision and business action plan was critical.
- The skills and attitudes of the workforce were also seen as critical. Zenos employs highly skilled, experienced and motivated staff. Good training is supported by good sales and marketing.
- Strong liaison with the IT industry is maintained through partnerships with large employers and the sector skills council. Zenos has built up a team of over 30 employment officers to support learners into jobs through liaison with over 200 prospective employers.

What were the challenges?

121. A major challenge for Zenos was to establish its academy-based programmed training programme as a viable and acceptable model for training young people suited to employment within the IT industry. The academy approach was adopted to bring training for 16–18-year-olds under its control and overcome the problems created by pressures at work causing disruption to training schedules.

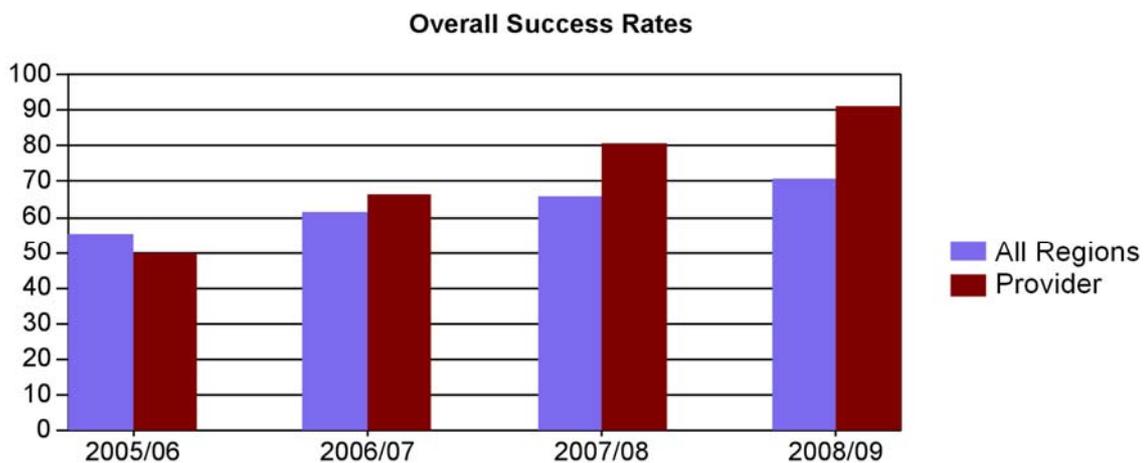
122. The early challenge of raising learners' motivation by increasing their prospects of employment at the end of training is considered another critical factor.

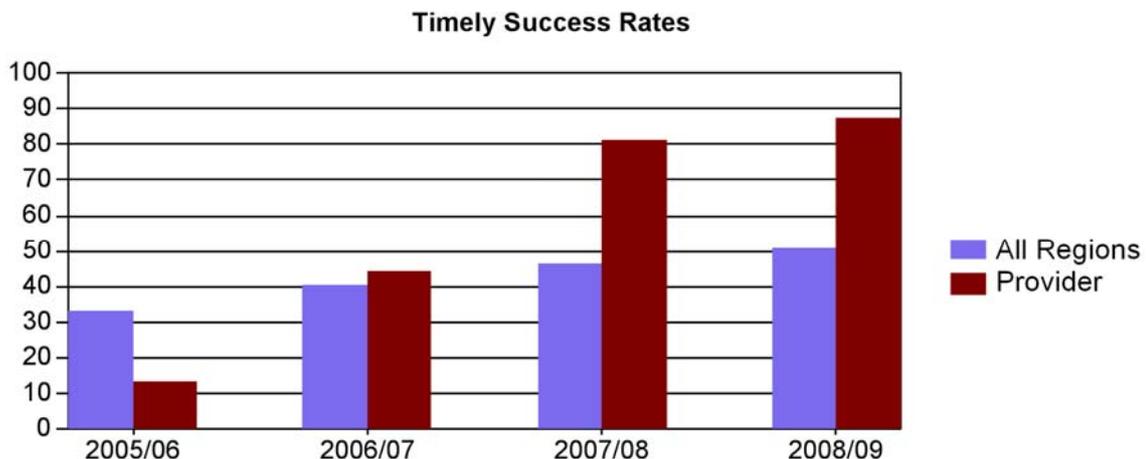
Providing additional IT organisation-specific 'vendor' qualifications, as complements to the advanced apprenticeship, has been important in providing learners with the skills and knowledge that employers value and that lead to employment. Around 90% of academy learners during the past two years have progressed into jobs within the IT industry.

How are high standards maintained?

- Zenos has invested in developing highly effective monitoring systems, targeting all aspects of training delivery. The progress of individual learners is monitored closely. The computerised database generates daily reports to inform all levels of management of successes and any concerns and to trigger prompt action to deal with any needs that are identified. Performance is evaluated against clearly defined expectations and objective targets.
- Quality improvement arrangements are not driven solely by targets about outcomes but also incorporate the quality of the delivery of services well. Systems for observing teaching, assessment and learning are robust; tutors and assessors are observed four times a year and supportive action is in place for staff who do not achieve good reports.

Figure 15: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?





5E

123. 5E Ltd is a not-for profit company established in 1998. Based in the London borough of Haringey, the company has expanded considerably and now operates from six training centres across north and north-east London. The company was judged to be outstanding in September 2008. Since August 2006 5E has been delivering Train to Gain programmes in north London in health, public services and care, information and communication technology, education and training, and business, administration and law. In 2007, 5E extended its services by providing employability skills programmes aimed at disadvantaged learners, many of whom have been unemployed for a long time and have no qualifications. 5E works in partnership with other local providers and organisations to deliver European Social Fund projects.
124. Almost 500 learners have been enrolled on Train to Gain programmes so far in 2009–10. ICT is the largest subject area with over 220 learners engaged in a wide range of programmes. These offer accredited courses for ICT users from entry level to specialist computer practitioner qualifications at level 5. Most of the 180 Train to Gain learners in health and social care are following NVQ programmes at Levels 2 and 3. Of the Train to Gain learners, 52% are women and 85% are aged between 25 and 54. Achievement for 2009–10 so far is 85%. 5E has also enrolled over 2,800 learners onto employability courses this year. Programmes have an emphasis on providing skills support for ESOL and for learners who have literacy and numeracy needs. These are integrated with training for employability skills, including confidence-building and jobsearch skills. A typical learner’s statement about the training received was:

‘I received lots of personal support and encouragement as a single parent who hadn’t worked for 14 years. My self-confidence was so low when I started, but tutors took the time to find out what my needs were, at home and for finding a job, and helped me plan my programme. Being able to do volunteer work gave me lots of confidence and I now have a job and I’m working towards getting vocational qualifications.’

How work-based learning is delivered

125. Learners are recruited largely through 5E's partnerships with local businesses. Small- and medium-sized employers, such as care homes, are targeted as part of the company's business development activities. 5E advisers carry out analyses of staff training needs for employers to identify skills gaps in the workforce. Each potential learner undergoes a thorough initial assessment of training needs; literacy, language and numeracy skills are assessed. Learners not meeting at least the required skills at level 1 are referred to local learndirect providers before they begin the NVQ programme. All learners are allocated a personal tutor who provides pastoral support. Learners receive a one-to-one interview with their assigned tutor/assessor as part of their induction into the NVQ programme. Individual development plans are agreed, setting out clear goals and progression targets including a plan for work-based assessment. Tutors complete detailed progress reviews every six to eight weeks. Off-the-job training sessions, including sessions on building a portfolio, are provided at 5E's centres.

The provider's view on training

126. 5E believes that it is playing an important role in an area of social deprivation, with a low-skilled population and high unemployment. By recognising the potential of local unemployed people to gain the skills needed to find jobs and for those in work to acquire new skills and become more effective, it has developed training services to meet a wide range of needs. The Director of 5E commented:

'Important factors in sustaining 5E's success are: ensuring the company provides the necessary resources to support clients' needs, especially in employing staff who possess the necessary skills set to support and monitor clients appropriately; staff who can understand and empathise with people from very disadvantaged backgrounds; staff who will instil the necessary attitudes and values in learners so they think better of themselves and are encouraged and motivated to progress and achieve and function more meaningfully at work and in the community.'

What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?

- 5E recruits the majority of its learners from disadvantaged communities in which, for many, training and employment are not part of everyday life. Thorough assessment of learners' needs initially and developing strong working relations early on with each learner were seen as critical factors in achieving success.
- Much staff time and resources are spent in assessing the needs of each new learner in depth to identify potential barriers to progress.

- Staff place high importance on creating and developing partnerships with learners as a means of being able to work together effectively and to support them in achieving their chosen goals.
- The key elements are to raise learners' expectations; to provide clear progression routes and agree challenging, but achievable targets; to help them to develop independent learning; and to enable them to make informed choices about progression routes, and to support those choices.

What were the challenges?

127. One of the most challenging features for 5E was to create an organisational infrastructure that was adapted to meet the learning needs of the local communities. These had very diverse social, economic, cultural and racial characteristics. Developing a stable workforce with the motivation and skills to support such wide diversity was the key challenge. The ethnic and cultural composition of 5E's staff mirrors that of its learners and the area where it operates, with most of the staff being from minority ethnic groups. Staff act as role models and many are ex-learners. They embrace and celebrate the multi-cultural ethos of 5E as an organisation which recognises and values individuality and potential in all its learners.

How are high standards maintained?

- 5E has established effective data systems which are used well to monitor and evaluate performance against set targets and to guide action-planning.
- Particularly good attention is paid to providing comprehensive off-the-job training for learners. Sessions are tailored to provide high levels of individual support; attendance is very high.
- Monitoring learners' progress on programmes is a priority and learners receive frequent one-to-one reviews and support sessions.
- Celebrating success and creating an environment in which all learners are valued provides high levels of motivation and optimism. 'Your success is our pride' posters provide pen portraits of learners who have benefited from their learning. These are displayed in all centres and feature in 5E's *Life and times* bi-monthly newsletter. Award ceremonies are held, involving organisation by the learners themselves, and these are seen as an important aspect of motivating learners to achieve.

How good are outcomes for learners?

128. The following statement from the provider's inspection report describes achievement in the various types of work-based learning offered by 5E.

'Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are consistently very high across all of the skills areas offered for both 2006–07 and 2007–08. For

Train to Gain learners on Skills for Life programmes, the success rate in 2007–08 was 100%. Train to Gain learners are inspired by their success and many go on to further training. On Employability Skills Programmes (ESP) the vast majority of learners achieve their learning goals and make significant progress in developing their language skills as well as excellent employability skills. Rates of employment are meeting the challenging targets set by the LSC [Learning and Skills Council] in the ESP contract. All learners make significant gains in confidence, employability and self-esteem. Train to Gain learners develop excellent workplace skills and greatly improve their working practices.'

Notes

The 12 providers were selected from those judged outstanding for their work-based learning during the period September 2007 to April 2010. They include independent training providers, colleges of further education and employer providers, and feature those who specialise in training in one vocational area and others who offer provision in several areas. The work ranges from delivering training on a national basis to programmes designed to meet the needs of a local community.

During the visit to each provider in May 2010, inspectors held discussions with managers, teaching staff, assessors and learners and, where possible, key employers were contacted. Providers' documentation and learners' work were considered, but the prime emphasis in making the visits was to collect evidence about what those people working in these providers gave as reasons for their success.

The portraits of the 12 outstanding providers are intended to represent the character of their work and some striking features, as well as giving data on success rates. The data have been reproduced with the agreement of the 12 providers and with permission from the Data Service. The portraits do not supplant the most recent inspection reports available on Ofsted's website.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

The impact of programme-led apprenticeships (070232), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070232.

How colleges improve (080083), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080083.

The impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment (070250), Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070250.

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

Managing Department for Work and Pensions contracts (080257), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080257.

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.

Moving through the system – information, advice and guidance (080273), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080273.

The Ofsted good practice database is located on the Excellence Gateway (www.excellencegateway.org.uk/). It includes a range of resources to support quality improvement and over 300 case studies of good practice identified through inspection of post-16 provision.

Other publications

Skills for jobs: today and tomorrow; The National Strategic Skills Audit for England, 2010, Volume 1: Key Findings; UK Commission for Employment and Skills;
www.ukces.org.uk/reports/skills-for-jobs-today-and-tomorrow-the-national-strategic-skills-audit-for-england-2010-volume-1-key-findings.

Websites

Information on apprenticeships can be found at the website of the National Apprenticeship Service:
www.apprenticeships.org.uk.