

# Good practice in involving employers in work-related education and training

---

This survey set out to determine the benefits of employers' involvement in government-funded work-related education and training, to identify the features of good practice and the ways in which the provision could be further improved.

**Age group:** Post-16

---

**Published:** October 2010

---

**Reference no:** 090227



Corporate member of  
Plain English Campaign  
Committed to clearer communication

**361**

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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090227](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090227).

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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No. 090227

© Crown copyright 2010



# Contents

---

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The benefits of involving employers</b>	<b>8</b>
Developing learners' skills and knowledge	8
Career opportunities, progression and support for retraining	9
The knowledge, skills and understanding of the providers' staff	11
Business benefits for employers and providers	11
Success rates	13
<b>Key features of effective practice</b>	<b>13</b>
Initiating and maintaining the involvement of employers	13
Working in partnership	15
Liaison and communication with employers	15
Reducing employers' barriers to training	17
The involvement of employers in developing providers' staff	18
Identifying learners' needs	18
Curriculum design and planning training	19
Teaching and training	21
Learning resources	22
Guidance and support for learners: the role of workplace mentors	23
Assessing learners	24
Reviews of learners' progress	25
<b>Key factors affecting the involvement of employers</b>	<b>26</b>
Involving employers in local, national and regional developments	27
The involvement of employers in quality improvement	28
One-way traffic	28
<b>Notes</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Further information</b>	<b>29</b>
Publications by Ofsted	29
Other publications	30
<b>Annex A: Providers visited for this survey</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Annex B: Sector subject areas covered by the survey</b>	<b>33</b>

## Executive summary

This survey set out to determine the benefits of employers' involvement in government-funded work-related education and training, to identify the features of good practice and the ways in which the provision could be further improved. Between September 2009 and April 2010, inspectors visited 30 providers of work-related education and training that had been judged to be good or outstanding at their previous inspection and with key strengths in involving employers in planning, delivering or reviewing provision. Inspectors found benefits for employers, learners and providers in the provisions visited.

The employers gained well-skilled and knowledgeable staff who understood their work roles and contributed effectively to business performance. Staff were generally better motivated and retention had improved as a result of employers' involvement in, and commitment to, training. Employers with small businesses had often received good business support from specialist training providers to help them keep up to date with changes in legislation or current business practice. Twenty-two of the providers visited helped employers to obtain public funding for training.

The education and training providers also benefited, and had enhanced their own offer to learners by involving themselves with employers. The physical and learning resources they were able to provide for learners were modern and made good use of employers' advice on current industry practice. They were able to expand their range of courses or the level of qualifications that they offered, and increase recruitment. The vocational knowledge and skills of their staff improved, as did their understanding of the needs of employers.

Even in the case of the good and outstanding arrangements that were surveyed for this report, which were having clear benefits for the employers, it was overwhelmingly the education and training providers that had initiated the relationship. In 26 of the 30 providers visited, the involvement was at the instigation of the providers rather than the employers. This has considerable implications in terms of promoting demand-led training. Employers rarely made the first move to establish the relationship and become involved in or influential in the provision of education and training to meet their needs. None of the working relationships seen in this survey had been initiated by external organisations such as the brokerage service.<sup>1</sup>

It was easier to find examples of good involvement by employers when learning at work was an integral part of the learners' or participants' programmes, such as work-based learning and employability programmes. Employers were less involved in work-related courses which were delivered on college premises or on training providers' premises. In these cases, when employers were involved it was often with

---

<sup>1</sup> The Business Link service provides brokerage, skills advice and support to employers as a component of the Train to Gain programme.

work-placements on courses that required them, such as health and social care courses, or as part of a programme of guest speakers.

Involving employers was most successful when the employers and the providers worked in an effective partnership in which each recognised and valued what the other contributed. In these cases the education and training providers contributed their skill and expertise in needs analysis, teaching, training, learning and assessment. The employers contributed technical skill and expertise and an understanding of work practice within the sector. Mutually beneficial partnerships resulted in which the skills and expertise of both sides were brought together.

In some cases, partnerships influenced course content and delivery at local level, and in other cases influenced the regional and national development of qualifications. Typically, inspectors found this regional or national influence exercised by the larger providers visited, such as the colleges. Although the smaller providers visited had a good understanding of the needs of the employers they worked with, they had fewer opportunities, such as through local or sector partnerships, to influence regional or national developments.

## Key findings

- Good employer involvement had benefits for employers, providers and learners. The quality of provision improved and employees gained the skills valued by their employers. Learners made better progress towards their qualifications and were better prepared for employment.
- Almost all of the involvement of employers seen during the survey was at the instigation of providers. Employers rarely took the initiative to make or maintain contact with providers or to influence provision.
- None of the working relationships seen in this survey had been initiated by external organisations such as the brokerage service.
- The involvement of employers was most successful when the provider's commitment to working with employers was clear, communicated effectively to all staff in the organisation, and was well understood and supported by managers.
- In the best examples of employer involvement seen in the survey, strong partnerships were formed between employer and provider, in which each recognised and valued the other's contribution to developing provision to meet employers' and learners' needs.
- Size or lack of resources often made it difficult for the smaller provider and employer partnerships visited to influence the strategic planning and development of provision locally or nationally.
- Regular meetings with employers and frequent visits to their premises to identify their needs and discuss training were a strong feature of good practice. These visits were particularly effective when they were well documented and coordinated by the provider.

- Working with employers to develop resources and training materials was a highly effective mechanism of involving employers in developing the provision and in ensuring that it met employers' and learners' needs.
- In the best examples, providers trained employers' staff as mentors and coaches to improve links between on- and off-the-job training and the quality of provision for learners.
- The providers visited gave employers good information on work-related education and training and reduced barriers to their participation in education and training. They made clear the respective roles and expectations of providers and employers and successfully managed potential tensions between employers' needs and the requirements of national qualifications.
- The providers' staff surveyed improved their knowledge of their industry sectors and the demands of particular employment fields as a result of their engagement with employers. However, this development was not always part of a planned training programme, and good practice in involving employers in one area of learning was often not shared effectively across an organisation.
- The nature of employers' involvement depended on the type of provision and, often, on the sector. Some provision, such as work-based learning, lent itself more readily to involving employers. When work experience or work placements were built into a sector's vocational training and qualifications, they also helped to improve the involvement of employers.
- On full- and part-time work-related courses delivered at providers' premises, the better providers made suitable use of presentations by employers but insufficient use of real work case studies for learners' development and assessment. Local employers were not always sufficiently involved in designing these courses.
- Many of the providers visited did not use employers sufficiently in initially assessing learners or in their progress reviews. Providers also did not make sufficient use of their links with employers to evaluate their courses as part of their quality improvement programmes.

## Recommendations

Providers should:

- recognise that they will usually have to take the lead in establishing productive working relationships with employers
- ensure that liaison and communication with employers are systematic, sustained and well documented
- share good practice routinely across departments and across vocational sectors within their organisations
- involve employers more effectively in the initial assessment of learners and in their progress reviews, in evaluating courses and in improving the quality of provision

- share their plans for involving employers with their own staff at all levels.

Employers should:

- take more responsibility for engaging with providers and in shaping provision to meet their own needs.

Sector Skills Councils and other bodies representing employers should:

- improve mechanisms to enable smaller providers and the employers they work with to influence the development of provision nationally and locally
- encourage employers to become more actively involved with providers to ensure that they obtain the education and training they need.

Local and regional strategic groups, and local authority partnerships should:

- ensure that smaller, niche and independent providers are properly represented on groups responsible for local strategic planning.

## Background

1. Government policies for post-16 education and training have been based, for many years, on the need to improve competitiveness and the skills of the workforce. The Skills Strategy, first mentioned in *Success for all*, aimed to ensure that providers of education and training offered courses that responded to and met employers' needs for skills.<sup>2</sup>
2. The Leitch Review of Skills was similarly clear in its proposals that:

'...the skills system must meet the needs of individuals and employers. Vocational skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned.'<sup>3</sup>

The Leitch Review recognised that 'the framework must adapt and respond to future market needs'. It recommended that employers' engagement and investment in skills should be increased, and that more economically valuable skills should be provided.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills identified, as a priority, the need to:

---

<sup>2</sup> *Success for all: reforming further education and training – our vision for the future*, DfES, 2002; <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publicatio ns&ProductId=ACF9728&>

<sup>3</sup> *Leitch review of skills: prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*, HM Treasury, 2006; [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch\\_review\\_skills.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch_review_skills.htm).

'...develop more agile and responsive skills and employment provision, capable of anticipating and rapidly meeting employers' evolving skills and job requirements.'<sup>4</sup>

3. Sector Skills Councils work with employers' representatives, nationally and strategically, to influence vocational education and training policy by:
  - identifying the skills and knowledge that are used in, and needed by, their industry sectors
  - developing the associated national standards and qualifications.
4. Regionally and locally, employers are represented on partnerships associated with economic development. They can influence local arrangements for providing vocational education and training. They are represented on the governing bodies and boards of colleges of further education and independent training providers and they help to shape the work of these organisations. In some cases, such as group training associations, they may also own the training organisation.<sup>5</sup>
5. Employers are also more directly involved in providing work-related education and training. In work-based learning, they provide employment or work placements that include training and assessment on the job.<sup>6</sup> They also provide work experience for learners on full-time vocational education courses or support employees to take relevant part-time courses. Through Workstep programmes, they provide support and training to enable disabled people to enter or remain in employment.<sup>7</sup> On employability training programmes, they provide support and work experience to help people to gain employment.<sup>8</sup>

## The benefits of involving employers

### Developing learners' skills and knowledge

6. Involving employers successfully in learners' education and training contributed very effectively to developing learners' skills and knowledge and to preparing them for employment. In all the providers visited for this survey, learners

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ambition 2020: world class skills and jobs for the UK*, UKCES, 2009. [www.ukces.org.uk/publications-and-resources/browse-by-title/ambition-2020-world-class-skills-and-jobs-for-the-uk](http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications-and-resources/browse-by-title/ambition-2020-world-class-skills-and-jobs-for-the-uk).

<sup>5</sup> Group training associations are not-for-profit organisations. They provide training and other services on behalf of groups of local employers. For further information, see: [www.grouptrainingassociations.org.uk/index.html](http://www.grouptrainingassociations.org.uk/index.html).

<sup>6</sup> Ofsted has reported on this in *Twelve outstanding providers of work-based learning*, Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100112](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100112).

<sup>7</sup> See *Improving progression to sustainable, unsupported employment*, Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080258](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080258).

<sup>8</sup> Ofsted has evaluated employers' involvement in work-related education and training in *Managing Department for Work and Pensions contracts (080257)*, Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080257](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080257).

gained good technical skills and knowledge. The employers to whom inspectors spoke said that they were able to identify more precisely the skills and behaviours that their employees needed to perform effectively at work and the providers were more effective in supporting learners to develop these skills.

7. The employers reported that learners on work placements or on work-based learning programmes improved their professional practice and had a better understanding of the industry in which they worked. They gained confidence at work and in learning, improved their work behaviour and had a better understanding of what their employers expected. Their ability to communicate with colleagues and to work as members of a team often improved. For example, a warehouse supervisor said that, as a result of the company's involvement in training, staff were well trained in its administrative systems and logistics. They also understood the ethos and values of the organisation, and the time they spent in training paid dividends in the longer term.
8. Participants on Workstep programmes said that, as a result of the involvement of employers in their development and support, they were given motivating work challenges which helped them to progress and raised their expectations. These benefits were important not only for their success in employment but also improved their social skills.
9. Participants on programmes for unemployed people, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, said that the involvement of employers had helped them to gain a better understanding of the job skills and work standards required. For example, presentations from and discussions with employers were useful in letting them know about the sorts of behaviour that employers were looking for. Work placements helped participants to develop relevant work skills. Six of the providers visited used suitable voluntary work effectively to build participants' confidence and competence, and prepare them for employment. These initiatives helped participants to gain jobs, as illustrated in the following example.

A major motor manufacturer worked very closely with its local further education college and JobCentre to design a five-week programme to develop the skills of unemployed people. The programme was located on the manufacturer's premises but managed by the college. The aim was to give participants a good chance of passing the manufacturer's recruitment tests. The programme concentrated on providing a suitable mix of relevant motor vehicle manufacturing skills and literacy and numeracy skills. The programme recruited several hundred participants and was very successful. For example, 77% of the participants on one course gained employment with the manufacturer or with companies linked with it.

## **Career opportunities, progression and support for retraining**

10. All the programmes evaluated during this survey provided improved career prospects for learners and opportunities for them to make progress. In 18 of

the providers visited, collaboration with employers had led to the development of a range of courses, at different qualification levels or in related disciplines. These enabled learners to progress steadily to higher qualification levels, including foundation degrees. Learners on these programmes said that improved opportunities for training and development, together with encouragement from their employers, had helped them to progress at work and to develop their careers. In 19 of the providers visited, learners had created portfolios that included evidence of the work they had done with employers. Learners used these particularly well to show their accomplishments and skills and to contribute to their qualification assessments.

11. One of the providers visited had a very effective strategy for involving employers in learners' training and assessment on a course in website design:

Employers were invited to commission websites for their businesses. They briefed learners on their requirements and signed off web-design projects on completion; all this reflecting usual professional practice. The commissioning process and the resulting consultation with employers were key and challenging components in the learners' training and assessment. The provider was careful to select prospective web commissions that were within the capabilities of the learners. Clear information and checklists for the employers helped them to identify the requirements for their websites. The employers briefed learners thoroughly and monitored their progress carefully. Work was signed off only when the employers were satisfied that it met their needs. The employers gained effective, working websites, while the learners gained good practical experience that mirrored professional practice. They also gained good examples of their own work, both for the purposes of assessment and for including in portfolios to illustrate their skills to potential employers.

12. The group training associations visited were often particularly successful in ensuring that employers reinforced their learners' status as employees, making them feel part of the organisations with which they were placed. This helped to show learners how their work contributed to those businesses, improved their teamworking skills and gave them a good understanding of the employment opportunities that were available. Where work experience was a feature of learners' programmes, for example on full-time courses at colleges, the learners or participants were carefully matched to employers. This often led to employment.
13. Fourteen of the providers visited had responded well to employers' changing needs during periods of high redundancy in the local area, providing tailored courses to help people change jobs. For example, a large employer worked with the local college to improve the employability of staff under notice of redundancy by helping to retrain them in plumbing and motor vehicle repair. Another college, working in a regeneration partnership with its local authority, provided the qualifications and training in disability awareness required by the local licensing authority to help those made redundant to become self-

employed as taxi drivers. Effective collaboration enabled the providers to adapt their training to meet the needs of current and future employers more closely and generally helped learners to gain or remain in employment. The following example provides a further illustration of responsive provision during the economic downturn.

In consultation with employers in the local building industry, the college identified a demand for refurbishment skills. It adapted its curriculum to meet this demand by introducing an apprenticeship in building refurbishment for adults working in the local area. This gave these employees, who may otherwise have been at risk of losing their jobs, the opportunity to develop skills in building maintenance and repair and to remain in employment. The college and employers provided good information and guidance as the learners developed new skills and job roles. The changes also ensured that the college's resources continued to be well used and the numbers of students were maintained.

### **The knowledge, skills and understanding of the providers' staff**

14. In 22 of the 30 providers visited, involving employers in provision helped to improve the knowledge and skills of the providers' staff. Teaching staff improved their understanding of employers' different work roles and needs, and the requirements of the curriculum in meeting those needs. They kept up to date with the latest developments in the sector and improved their technical knowledge and skills. Staff from these providers visited employers, were seconded for periods of time into industry and helped to disseminate their learning among colleagues. This close cooperation between providers and employers helped to ensure that theory and practical work completed during training was successfully aligned to professional practice at work. However, although the involvement of employers was often beneficial in improving the competence and understanding of staff, this was not always part of a planned programme of staff development.

### **Business benefits for employers and providers**

15. Inspectors identified a range of benefits for employers. The most frequently occurring of these was that employers gained employees with the skills they needed to complete tasks and activities at work efficiently. For example, a hairdressing salon owner said that being actively involved in the provider's training programme ensured that her stylists were trained and knowledgeable. She also noted that they adapted well to the working arrangements in her salon and were therefore able to contribute to her business more effectively.
16. The employers interviewed reported less disruption in the workplace because training was tailored to meet their needs, with less 'down time', that minimised their employees' absence from work. They found that they had a better understanding of their learners' capabilities and were able to match them to appropriate tasks and activities or support them in areas where they needed

help. In 15 of the providers visited, employers had identified where learners had improved their understanding of good health and safety practices. For example, an employer in the passenger transport sector said 'staff have become much more aware of road safety, risk assessment, customer service and the needs of people with disabilities since doing their NVQs [National Vocational Qualifications]'.

17. Employers also reported other benefits, such as improvements in their organisation's credibility in tendering for contracts, which they attributed to the fact that their staff were trained and qualified. For example, one employer said that they were often required to provide evidence of training as part of tendering processes, and that their training provider was helping them to meet this requirement and gain contracts as a result.
18. Sixteen of the providers visited trained workplace supervisors in coaching, mentoring and assessment skills. Their employers said that this had improved in-house learning and qualifications. Eight of these employers reported improved growth and an increased market share because their staff turnover reduced; employees were keen to stay with their employers because of the good training they received.
19. Over half the providers visited helped employers in small businesses to keep up to date with legislation and employment practices. This was highly valued. One training provider in hairdressing had strong, sustained links with many employers and had developed a particularly effective support network.

The training provider's managers made time for employers to talk through any business issues that arose. They kept up to date with changes in the sector and passed on relevant information about changes in employment law, health and safety, and safeguarding. Employers received a regular, informative newsletter and information packs which contained practical information on, for example, policies and procedures, health and safety guidance, and information on equal opportunities. Employers appreciated this support and, as a result, were very keen to work with the provider.

20. For the providers visited for this survey, involving employers successfully in developing provision often led to enhancing the reputation of the provider. The improved knowledge and expertise that they gained through their work with employers gave them greater credibility and encouraged more employers to work with them. In 22 of the providers visited, the close involvement of employers had led to an expansion of provision to meet increased demand in similar or related sector skills areas, and led to further business with other employers. This is illustrated here.

A manufacturer of luxury leather goods noticed that its skilled and experienced staff were getting older and, at the same time, it was becoming more difficult to find suitably skilled new recruits. The company turned to a local college for help in training new staff in the specialist skills

it required. Although the college offered courses in textiles to a small number of students, it had little experience of manufacturing leather goods. However, the employer recognised that the college had experience and skills in teaching, learning and assessment; in working with government funding, and in providing nationally recognised and accredited awards. The college, the company and the Sector Skills Council worked successfully together to recruit suitable teaching staff and to develop a flourishing and successful apprenticeship training programme at the employer's premises. Since then, the college has also enhanced its provision for full-time students on textiles courses, increased recruitment to these courses and expanded provision into the laundry and dry-cleaning industry.

## Success rates

21. Twenty-six of the providers visited had good or outstanding success rates for the provision evaluated for this survey. The support and involvement of the employers helped to sustain these high success rates by improving learners' motivation and commitment, improving their retention on the programme or helping them to move to unsupported employment. Involving employers effectively ensured that training and support for learners were provided when needed, and this helped learners to make good progress towards their qualifications.
22. At 16 of the providers visited, collaboration between the senior staff of the employers and providers ensured that learners were given the time and resources to complete their training and assessment. In 22 of the providers, learners were able to maintain their motivation because teaching staff and assessors had a good understanding of their work, and employers had a good understanding of the learners' training and assessment needs. One of the providers had developed particularly close and beneficial working relationships with union learning representatives to identify training opportunities, support the development of courses for employees and enable them to gain recognised qualifications.
23. However, the involvement of employers did not always guarantee high success rates, and particularly the timeliness of success rates, during a period of economic uncertainty. For example, the downturn in the housing market during the recession had delayed the completion of one provider's course on property services.

## Key features of effective practice

### Initiating and maintaining the involvement of employers

24. Sixteen of the 71 employers to whom inspectors spoke had approached their local providers to help them meet business needs through training and development. For example, an employer in the manufacturing industry needed

to provide its employees with a significant number of new skills to meet changing demands for its products, and approached its local college for help in retraining. However, these approaches were in the minority. Indeed, in one example, the employer interviewed said he had needed to overcome negative preconceptions about local education and training providers when approaching them, but had been delighted with their subsequent response. None of the working relationships seen in this survey had been initiated by external organisations such as the brokerage service.

25. The majority of the providers had initiated their work with employers themselves as part of promotional activities. Initial contact was equally effective whether it was made by subject staff or by staff specialising in liaison with employers. The latter were most successful when they were an integral part of the providers' provision, working closely with staff more directly involved in teaching and assessment. However the initial contact was made, the involvement was cemented most effectively when staff from the providers worked with employers to:

- identify the benefits that training programmes would bring to their businesses
- develop or adapt the programmes to meet their needs.

26. In the providers visited, the involvement of employers was enhanced considerably when the whole organisation was committed to being involved and working with them. Providers and employers gained greater involvement and influence at more senior levels and provided better systems and infrastructure for liaison and involvement at operational levels. In the best examples seen, it enabled and encouraged the provider's staff to follow leads and explore opportunities to develop provision with employers. Much of this, when successfully established, resulted in a wider range of benefits for learners and employers than might have been envisaged, as in this example.

A further education college played a pivotal role in supporting its local borough's regeneration strategy. It focused on developing foundation and intermediate level skills for learners and employers. The college had developed some outstanding partnership work, notably with its local borough council, and with other local strategic and business groups. This ensured a consistent and coordinated approach to regeneration in the borough. In 1997, the college established a centre for innovation and partnerships. This centre was key in encouraging local entrepreneurship, support and training for employers and for employment. The college met the diverse learning and employment-related needs of its local area very successfully through open access and arrangements for flexible learning. Around 80% of its students were from the local area and 80% were adults taking a very wide range of short and long courses. College staff strongly supported and were wholly involved in achieving the college and borough's regeneration objectives.

## Working in partnership

27. In the most productive partnerships found during the survey, employers understood and valued providers' expertise in teaching, learning and assessment. The providers valued and made good use of the technical and vocational expertise that the employers provided. When new provision was being planned and developed in response to employers' needs, employers contributed well to developing the curriculum and influencing the content of the training and choice of qualification. One further education college was involved in a number of initiatives.

The college had developed a new apprenticeship in sports coaching in collaboration with a sports training specialist and its local football club. It helped other employers to develop an apprenticeship programme with a fashion retailer, part of a major franchise, to include interviewing and assessing potential apprentices against agreed criteria. An NVQ in food manufacturing, developed in collaboration with a large local food processing company, evolved into apprenticeship provision for a wider range of learners. In response to the needs of employers, the college increased its NVQ programme in warehousing and storage with commercial driving qualifications by working with a local specialist training provider for these awards.

28. Inspectors identified two different types of partnership during their visits to providers. In the colleges visited, they tended to be between individual subject departments in the college and large, often national, employers. There was evidence of strategic influence on provision nationally and on the work of the college department. However, this good practice and influence did not always extend to other departments within the college or to those working with smaller businesses. The colleges visited rarely referred inspectors to partnerships with small- or medium-sized businesses or to groups of these businesses.
29. By contrast, the smaller providers visited often worked with small- and medium-sized organisations or groups of organisations. Their size and attendant flexibility enabled them to respond particularly effectively to these employers' needs. However, they rarely had the opportunity to contribute to national strategy or to developing provision regionally, for example through local strategic groups or national forums, either because they were not invited to participate or because they lacked the resources or capacity to do so.

## Liaison and communication with employers

30. In all the providers visited, communication between the providers and employers helped to develop provision and staff effectively. This included regular meetings between employers and providers at senior levels. In 11 of the providers visited, employer liaison groups helped to involve employers in developing the provision offered, although the effectiveness of these groups varied. Sixteen of the providers visited sent regular newsletters to employers

and held networking events or seminars to keep employers up to date with changes in qualifications or developments in the sector.

31. Teaching staff and assessors visited learners at work or on their work placements and held meetings to monitor their progress. In addition, other staff visited employers frequently to monitor the progress of their learners and to meet their workplace supervisors. The employers reported that these staff took particular care to get to know their working practices and kept them well informed about the training programme or learners' needs. At one of the providers visited, liaison between the provider's staff and employers had been particularly effective in enabling learners to be seconded. Such secondments helped learners to gain the experience they needed to achieve their qualification if it was not possible to do this in their own workplace.
32. One Workstep provider's regular contact with its employers was particularly helpful in enabling participants to remain in employment.

The provider's job coaches shadowed participants at work to identify their needs for support.<sup>9</sup> They provided good training and help for participants at work and regular meetings with the employers provided additional information on participants' support needs. The job coaches often identified difficulties outside the workplace that were affecting the work of individual participants and the coaches referred participants to other support agencies where appropriate. If necessary, the provider held additional meetings with the employer to identify what was preventing participants from remaining in work. This was followed by a brief meeting with individual participants to identify whether additional support and coaching would be useful. A signed contract detailed the provider's, employer's and participant's commitment.

33. The providers visited managed communication effectively to make sure that employers did not receive too much information. In 22 of the 30 providers, specialist liaison staff kept careful records of contacts with employers to share information among the staff of the provider and to avoid duplication. This liaison role was key in directing enquiries from employers and facilitating effectiveness and responsiveness between the teaching staff or assessors and the employers. The employers said that, in these instances, communication with the provider tended to be better coordinated and more systematic. In the best of these examples, the liaison staff were an integral part of the teaching or assessment teams that worked with the providers. However, inspectors found little evidence that the providers systematically monitored or evaluated the quality of their liaison with employers or provided information on the employers' contribution to the quality of the provision.

---

<sup>9</sup> Job coaches are trained specifically to identify the skills and competencies needed to complete tasks in particular jobs and they train people to develop those skills in the workplace. In some of the most effective practice, this may be provided for several months or up to a year.

34. One provider had developed a team of training consultants whose role was to liaise with and engage employers.

Each team member was allocated a number of employers. Team members held regular meetings with the employers allocated to them to identify training needs associated with the business. This regular contact, close working and clearly identified role ensured that the employers were not contacted on numerous occasions by different staff from the same provider. In addition, training consultants had a good understanding of the needs and demands of the businesses of each of their employers and were able to respond quickly and effectively to specific requests for training. Employers reported positively on these arrangements. They said that they helped them to plan training to meet the changing needs of their industries and that the arrangements ensured that training was offered at times to meet their differing business demands.

35. At the best providers visited, managers kept caseloads manageable to ensure that staff were able to respond promptly to employers' requests for information. The time and location of training or assessment were designed to fit in with employers' work patterns and needs. For example, they were offered at evenings or weekends as well as during office hours, at an employer's premises, at the provider's or elsewhere, according to need, and through day or block release of staff from work. Six of the providers visited used distance learning programmes effectively to train learners. However, much of this communication took place at the instigation of providers.
36. In the best examples seen, providers gave employers clear information on the training role of the employer and the provider, the ways in which they complemented each other, and the agreed methods for fulfilling these roles. The providers working with employers in small businesses often gave additional information on good employment practice. On the Workstep programmes visited, employers received particularly clear and helpful information about the participants' support needs and on strategies for providing support. Importantly, 23 of the 30 providers also managed employers' expectations carefully, making clear what the employers could, and could not, expect of providers and the training programmes that learners were following.

### **Reducing employers' barriers to training**

37. The providers worked hard to reduce employers' real or perceived barriers to training and qualifications and made it easier for their employees to participate in training. For example, one provider arranged travel at a reduced cost for low-paid employees to enable them to travel to training venues. More frequently, the providers produced detailed information for employers which made the training, assessment and funding arrangements easier for them to understand. For example, they illustrated the national occupational standards

towards which learners were working with examples based on the employers' own documentation or procedures.<sup>10</sup> Ten of the providers of work-based learning had matched employers' training programmes to the standards required for learners' qualifications. They also made assessment materials relevant to employers' work practices, or aligned them with employers' competency statements to make the best use of learners' work experience. This helped to ensure that on-the-job training, practical work and assessments were well planned and completed within agreed timescales. For example, a supervisor in a care home said that her improved understanding enabled her to give employees the opportunity to put their training into practice at work and make good progress in their qualifications.

38. Twenty-two of the providers visited helped employers to obtain public funding for training. One of the providers used its links with the careers service very effectively to improve the take-up of apprenticeships in its local area.
39. The best providers visited were successful at managing the potential tension between the immediate and specific needs of employers and individual learners' interest in gaining nationally recognised qualifications. The employers recognised that training and qualifications might include skills or knowledge for which they had no immediate need. At the same time, these providers made every effort to accommodate, within the training provided, other skills that employers needed.

### **The involvement of employers in developing providers' staff**

40. Staff who had been seconded to industry from the provider for short periods of time or had extended visits to employers to learn about their work found these opportunities to be very effective in developing their skills and understanding. However, only three of the providers visited had this as part of a planned programme of development for staff. Other providers employed part-time teaching staff who also worked in the sector to provide current and specialist skills. Despite the benefits of these arrangements, inspectors found only one instance in which employers came forward to offer placements or training for providers' full-time staff or to volunteer other information or guidance for staff on their work practices.

### **Identifying learners' needs**

41. When employers were involved effectively in learners' recruitment, induction or initial assessment, they said that it helped to make sure that learners had the aptitude to develop the skills that employers needed, to identify the skills needs effectively and to plan a programme of development to meet them. However, employers were involved in the recruitment and induction of learners or the

---

<sup>10</sup> The national occupational standards describe the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to undertake a particular task or job to a nationally recognised level of competence. For more information, see: [www.ukstandards.org.uk](http://www.ukstandards.org.uk).

initial assessment of their needs at only nine of the providers visited. Five of these providers specialised in working with employers in particular skills sectors, such as engineering or hairdressing. One provider of programmes to help unemployed people find work used careers fairs effectively to bring employers together with jobless people to aid recruitment. A work-based learning provider carried out joint induction programmes with employers of the young people recruited to its apprenticeship programme. Another made good use of trial periods of employment and training to determine whether learners and employers were well suited.

42. One training provider had a particularly effective approach to matching learners to employers and job roles.

Employers were offered a brokering service to help recruit suitable apprentices to jobs. Candidates had an initial interview and assessment with the provider to identify their aspirations and needs. The provider and the employer worked together to match these to the job roles and opportunities that were available. The provider had developed a useful range of guidance for candidates, giving them detailed information about individual employers and good advice on preparing for the interview. Employers interviewed the candidates who were matched well to particular job roles and provided suitable work placements. For successful candidates, these often led to employment. For example, an employer identified that an apprentice in business administration was interested in dance and drama. It arranged for her to work in that part of the organisation where, ultimately, she gained employment.

43. However, these examples tended to be the exception rather than the rule. Fourteen of the 30 providers visited made little use of their links with employers during the early stages of their learners' participation in training, to plan individual training programmes or to identify learners' aptitudes and the skills they needed.

## Curriculum design and planning training

44. The larger providers visited, such as colleges, used their links with employers well to inform and design the curriculum they offered. For example, they had developed a wide range of courses in the sector to allow learners to progress from entry level to higher qualification levels. In six of the providers visited, this included foundation degrees. The employers that they worked with said that the wide range of courses contributed to meeting their need for skills at different levels and provided employees with career development and progression routes. Providers that offered bespoke vocational education and training for important niche employers found that it had a bigger impact on the curriculum than originally envisaged. For example, it led to specific provision to meet particular employment needs, improved delivery and uptake of provision that already existed, and an expansion of provision to meet a much wider range of employment needs.

At one college, the involvement of employers in curriculum development was dynamic and interactive, helping to prepare learners very well for work. For example, in hairdressing, a regional hairdressing employer played a key role in directing, developing and supporting a commercially based focus for learning. The college operated a very busy hairdressing salon to train its foundation, intermediate and advanced learners. The salon provided a very well-regarded setting in which learners developed a good range of employability skills. Although the salon was primarily a training environment, it was operated on a commercial basis to commercial standards set by the employer. Systematic, employer-led training for college teaching staff set a consistent standard for providing training and ensured that staff were aware of current industry trends and techniques. Learners, particularly those at an advanced level, developed a high standard of skills and gained good experience in customer relations to support their employability.

45. The smaller providers visited, or those working with a particular sector skills area, had fewer opportunities to develop and expand the curriculum in this way. Nonetheless, at a more operational level, employers working with 23 of the providers visited played an important part in helping to design or influence the content of off-the-job training or education, so that it matched more closely the activities learners carried out at work. For example, if optional units were available within a particular qualification, employers and learners were involved in selecting the most appropriate unit to meet individual learners' and employers' needs. Those providers that offered work-based learning, where training programmes should be tailored to meet individual learners' needs, were very effective at involving employers in planning training for individual learners to ensure that on-the-job coaching or training were systematic and met the requirements of learners' awards, or that on- and off-the-job training complemented each other.
46. Inspectors found several instances in which part-time teaching and training staff were also employers, thus helping to influence course content and design to meet their needs. For example, an electrical installation employer was also a part-time tutor. He made valuable contributions to the design of lessons and course materials to make them more relevant to industry. Employers working with three of the six Workstep providers visited were closely involved in helping to plan and provide support for participants to ensure that they developed good skills and contributed effectively at work, as illustrated by the following example.

One Workstep provider had a particularly well-phased and careful process for introducing participants to employment. At the start of their involvement, the provider gave the employer's staff well-designed training on the participant's specific needs and held regular meetings with the participant and employer to ensure that the job role and expected tasks were clear, challenging and meaningful. Each participant was allocated a mentor, who was usually a former participant now employed by the same

employer. Mentors understood the challenges of moving into work particularly well and gave participants motivating help and support to enable them to develop the skills they needed. They helped participants to provide training for other staff on their needs and disability. For example, a participant provided a series of training sessions for his colleagues on the specific needs of people who had Asperger's syndrome. The support of these mentors helped participants to live more independently and successfully remain in employment for at least six months, and helped many participants to gain promotion at work.

## Teaching and training

47. Employers were often involved in coaching learners or supporting participants at work, particularly in work-based learning or on Workstep programmes. For example, 14 of the 30 providers had trained workplace supervisors in coaching or teaching to help them to carry out their role as on-the-job trainers more effectively. It helped these supervisors to develop learners' skills and knowledge at work, or provide a suitable range of support to help disabled people to carry out their jobs successfully.
48. At 17 of the providers visited, inspectors also found examples of employers' contributions to classroom teaching or off-the-job training, for example to improve learners' knowledge of careers in the sector. The type and extent of this involvement varied from provider to provider, and from one sector subject area to another. In one provider, veterinary surgeons and nurses contributed extensively to off-the-job training for veterinary nursing apprentices, helping to ensure that their training was relevant and up to date. Elsewhere, training included 'guest speaker' or 'master class' sessions with an employer. A provider of employability training used employers successfully to develop participants' understanding of what employers were looking for at recruitment. A college made good use of a wide range of residential courses offered by employers in the uniformed public services to develop learners' teamworking skills and help them to make informed choices about their careers. A provider of training in equine studies developed collaborative working between a livery stable and a riding school to ensure that learners could participate in a wider range of activities.
49. In sectors such as engineering, or on full-time courses, employers' presentations were often a refreshing addition to learners' training, providing current and relevant careers advice for learners or information that was very specific to a particular topic. For example, at one employer, health care professionals explained recent developments in medication. However, inspectors found that, at three providers, 'guest speaker' sessions were not always sufficiently purposeful or planned and did not lead to effective learning.

## Learning resources

50. As a result of their collaboration with employers, 19 of the providers visited had improved their training resources and accommodation for learners. For example, one employer sponsored the provision of electronic musical equipment for music students. Two of the colleges visited, each working closely with different motor vehicle manufacturers, had been supplied with the latest equipment and vehicles for use by all students at the college, not just those employed by the individual manufacturers. Sponsorship by employers was used well by these providers to garner good quality and up-to-date resources and make them available for learners.
51. Improvements in resources were not always based on employers' donations or funding for equipment. Twenty of the providers visited made good use of the technical expertise of employers to help to develop teaching and training resources and to ensure that learners had access to up-to-date, industry-standard equipment. This was seen particularly within the engineering, electrical installation, building services, travel and tourism, music and hairdressing sectors. It was an effective mechanism for encouraging employers to become more closely involved in developing programmes or provision. For example, employers gave good advice on designing and equipping providers' training facilities to ensure that they were effective, realistic work environments. This is illustrated in the following example.

A work-based learning provider had made a considerable investment in developing a realistic working environment for training in warehousing, with high quality, industry-standard equipment. It had worked particularly closely with local and national industries to build and equip a bespoke working and training warehouse in line with their recommendations. Frequent consultation with employers ensured that equipment in the warehouse was of the highest standard, and that any changes in industry requirements were accommodated swiftly. Major retailers used the facility as a working warehouse so that learners had particularly good opportunities to learn from commercial and technical practice and develop a range of skills and competencies before going into employment.

52. The providers visited also worked closely with employers to prepare high-quality training resources which made good use of information about employers' systems and processes. Much of the resource development that inspectors saw had required comparatively straightforward adaptation to make resources more useful for learners and illustrative of the skills or work practice that they needed. For example, providers integrated employers' documentation, systems and processes into their learning sessions. Other, more complex training resources included a simulated booking system for a travel agency, developed by a provider of training in travel and tourism. One provider worked very productively with local employers to produce tailored learning materials.

The provider combined the employer's knowledge, systems and tools with its own expertise in training and development. The learning packages were written in the language used by the employer, with workplace procedures and good use of workplace illustrations. Employers valued this collaboration, as well as the quality and relevance of the materials produced, and contacted the provider as their first choice for staff development. A good example of this occurred when the local fire and rescue service identified that too many of its employees were not passing the assessments required for promotion. It contacted the training provider and together they developed a training module for the assessment development centre. As a result, success rates increased, the assessment development centres were more efficient, and the employer's management capacity improved.

## Guidance and support for learners: the role of workplace mentors

53. Fourteen of the providers visited used employer-based mentors particularly successfully to guide and support learners. Used mainly on work-based learning or Workstep programmes, these mentors acted as effective links between providers and employers, helping to identify learning and support needs during learners' training. They played an important part in ensuring that learners were given the opportunity and the resources to learn and achieve at work. For example, they helped to ensure that learners were placed in work roles and provided with training that would help them to develop the skills and knowledge they needed. One of the providers visited gave supervisors advice to help them provide specific support to meet the needs of work-based learners who had dyslexia or who needed support for literacy. In more widely geographically dispersed provision, mentors helped to provide day-to-day support for learners who were remote from their training provider. They also provided guidance and additional training if learners were struggling, or had personal problems or difficulties, in some instances helping them to remain on their programme or in employment as a result. They helped to ensure that participants on Workstep programmes were given the help or specialist resources that they needed to contribute effectively at work.
54. The providers supported work-based mentors well through regular and frequent contact at operational and senior management levels, and they gave mentors good information on their role in helping learners to progress. If managers also had a mentoring and training role, it often led to well-coordinated and structured on- and off-the-job training. One provider introduced well-designed mentoring workshops in which mentors and learners participated and learned from each other.

The workshops helped to identify the skills and knowledge that learners expected from their mentors. Mentors evaluated their own skills through a straightforward evaluation tool and were given detailed, thorough and well-prepared guidance on their roles and their learners' qualifications.

Mentors reported that, since taking part in the workshops, they had guided learners more effectively and taken a more active role in their development, helping them to meet their training and employment targets and complete their frameworks more quickly. Some mentors were inspired to gain a competence-based qualification to increase their own understanding of the learners' programmes. The provider celebrated the work of successful mentors through awards events.

## Assessing learners

55. The involvement of employers in providers' assessments of their learners presented a mixed, and not always successful, picture. In 12 of the 30 examples of work-based learning provision visited, providers used workplace supervisors to assess learners' competence for their qualifications. Eleven of the providers had trained and accredited these supervisors as assessors and there was clear guidance on the supervisors' role in the learners' assessment. This had several potential benefits for learners. Their assessors were on hand, so assessment could be timed to fit in with learners' work patterns more effectively. One employer said that its supervisors' involvement in assessment meant that 'it did not impinge on work activities and provided tangible evidence for appraisal and the promotion of trainees'. Inspectors also found that supervisors had a good understanding of learners' awards and the associated standards required.
56. However, in three of the 12 work-based learning providers, relying on supervisors as a strategy for assessing learners was not always beneficial. In one provider, it led to delays in learners' assessment when supervisors (and learners) were too busy with work to allocate time for assessment against occupational standards. Close liaison between providers and assessors and careful planning of assessment therefore remained essential if this strategy was to work effectively. Employers needed to commit themselves to participating in providers' mechanisms for developing assessors and for monitoring and quality assuring the assessments they carried out.
57. The following example illustrates how learners benefited when the process was well managed.

Learners attending a course on preparing for the uniformed services at a further education college benefited greatly from assessments carried out by members of the armed services. These took place when learners were on residential and other courses. The college used the results of the assessments well to plan learners' development and prepare them for entry to the service. Learners on the residential courses received a detailed report on their current aptitudes, including good information on the areas for improvement if they were to succeed in the recruitment tests. Close collaboration with employers meant that the learners were able to take recruitment tests in the college. If successful, learners were fast-tracked through the recruitment processes because the employers

were more confident that the learners would reach their required performance standards.

58. In the better examples of assessment practice on full- or part-time courses, employers provided genuine case studies or developed projects for learners' assessment, thus testing learners' skills and knowledge in more relevant and realistic situations. In one college, employers providing work placements for full- and part-time students were given detailed information on learners' training and assessment and the ways in which they could contribute, helping to make the work placements more beneficial and meaningful for both the learner and the employer. In another example, employers contributed to learners' assessments, for example by judging whether learners had fulfilled the requirements of a project brief.
59. Of the remaining providers visited, eight did not use assessment sufficiently effectively as a strategy for involving employers. This was either because they had not developed supervisors' skills in training or assessing employees or because supervisors were not sufficiently involved in a planned and quality assured programme of assessment for learners.

## Reviews of learners' progress

60. In the better examples of the involvement of employers' in progress reviews, employers were key contributors and helped learners to make good progress. Reviews involving learners, providers and employers helped to ensure that all parties had a good understanding of learners' training and assessment needs and the progress they were making towards their qualifications. One work-based learning provider developed its progress reviews to ensure that employers took a particularly active part.

Employers were required to provide a review of their learners' progress each month. The reviews included information on the training that had taken place at work and the progress that learners had made in developing their skills and knowledge. The reviews were sent to the provider before the review meeting. The provider also produced termly reports for the employer, giving information on each learner's progress and achievements during her or his off-the-job training. During each progress review, the member of staff from the provider, the learner and the supervisor met for a detailed discussion of the learner's programme. They used the review reports to inform the learners' training and assessment. As a result, learners, supervisors and the provider had a good understanding of what learners had achieved and what they still needed to do. The learners valued their reviews and made good progress towards achieving their qualifications.

61. Four of the providers visited carried out reviews only if a supervisor was also available to contribute. One provider received written feedback each month from the employer and the provider reported termly to the employers on

learners' progress in their off-the-job training. This helped to judge learners' progress accurately and to identify any gaps in performance. Ten of the 30 providers visited did not make sufficient use of employers' views on learners' performance in progress reviews.

62. Although providers often gave employers feedback on learners' progress, this was used in learners' performance appraisals at work in only five of the providers visited. The employers of learners on part-time work-related courses rarely commented on the learners' performance at work, even when the learners had been sponsored by their employer to attend training or they had been given time off work to study for a work-related qualification.

## Key factors affecting the involvement of employers

63. The range of interaction found on this survey suggested that much of the involvement of employers in formal education and training depended on:
  - the opportunities presented by the course
  - the particular sector subject area
  - the availability and willingness of employers to contribute.

For example, in sectors such as health and social care, or hairdressing, it was easier to involve employers because of a tradition of training learners in the workplace, or because work placements were a requirement of the qualification towards which learners were working.

64. The ways in which providers involved employers were also varied and reflected diversity in both the type of training delivery, from full-time education and training to work-based learning, or support for people to enter and sustain employment. However, good practice from one delivery method or sector was not always transferred systematically to benefit other areas of the provider's work.
65. Inspectors sought evidence of good practice in involving employers in a wide range of delivery types. It was much easier to find good practice in work-based learning or employability training, where learners already had a clear link with employers, than in full- or part-time education and training based at a provider. This was true even in providers such as colleges, where they use a wide range of different approaches to training and development. The colleges visited generally used employer liaison groups and had employers on their governing bodies. However, employers were involved directly in teaching full- or part-time on education and training courses in only three of the providers visited. These employers were also part-time teachers. Inspectors judged, however, that this was appropriate and that teaching on full- and part-time courses was most appropriately carried out by those who were trained and accomplished as teachers and trainers. Inspectors judged that teaching, learning and assessment were professional activities which required specialist pedagogical

skills. The best partnership working occurred when providers and employers recognised each other's differing skills and contributions in developing and delivering provision. In work-based learning, where on-the-job training was often an important feature of learners' programmes, learning was most effective when the providers gave employers help and training to enable them to provide learners with effective coaching and training in the workplace.

66. Where work placements were a requirement of learners' courses, the providers visited had good arrangements for liaising with employers to secure such placements. However, just two of the providers visited used employers' specialist knowledge and skills systematically to help them to design or develop their full- or part-time work-related education and training courses outside work-based learning or employability training. This was, for example, by designing specialist optional units to meet local needs or structuring the course to meet needs more closely.

### **Involving employers in local, national and regional developments**

67. As part of the survey, inspectors sought examples of good practice in the involvement of employers in developing the curriculum and national qualifications offered, and found them in only four of the providers visited.
68. Typically, this good practice occurred when large colleges, offering a wide range of courses in many different subject areas, had positioned themselves strategically at the heart of local partnerships to contribute to, develop and respond to local economic and employment priorities and needs. For example, two of the colleges visited were actively involved in partnerships with a range of public and private sector organisations focusing on local regeneration. As a result, they were able to influence development regionally and nationally. In such circumstances, these partnerships clearly played a pivotal role in shaping the curriculum to meet local employers' needs. In these institutions, inspectors found that the involvement of employers was effective not only strategically, but operationally as well, when responses to individual employers' needs, even though small in terms of the numbers of learners, had ultimately had a dramatic impact on the curriculum that the college offered. In some instances, colleges had influenced the content of qualifications and frameworks to meet employers' needs more closely.
69. Inspectors found that the small providers visited, and the employers that they worked with, were not sufficiently represented regionally or nationally. Only three of these small providers had effective links with sector skills organisations, and these were through specific individuals within the organisations. Their opportunities for a more strategic influence locally, regionally or nationally were generally restricted. In part, this was because of a lack of resources, capacity or leverage, or a lack of opportunity to do so as part of, for example, local or regional partnerships with other schools and colleges.

Where small providers specialised in only one sector subject area, they were not always able to expand the range of qualifications that they offered.

## The involvement of employers in quality improvement

70. All the providers visited were generally effective in collecting and using feedback from employers about the service they offered. Much of their responsiveness was attributable to their willingness to seek employers' views on provision and to improve. However, only three providers involved employers effectively in more formal reviews of provision, such as course reviews or self-assessment. Even when their partnership was strong and successful, the remaining providers did not use detailed discussion and feedback sufficiently to assess the impact of the training and the design of courses. For example, the providers of full-time courses did not systematically check the appropriateness of their courses or training with employers who had recruited learners at the end of their programme. Where it did happen, it tended to be informal or anecdotal.
71. One of the employers visited held regular learning forums that brought together its own training and development team to evaluate its training programmes and identify areas for improvement.

The employer involved the staff from one of its work-based learning providers in its learning forum. The provider's involvement was highly valued by the employer because the employer received feedback on its learners that it would not otherwise have received. This feedback was discussed at a very senior level and had a significant impact on the employer's appraisal systems and the amount of time and support given to learners for study. The employer saw involving the provider as a valuable addition to its quality assurance.

## One-way traffic

72. In 26 of the 30 providers visited, the involvement of employers in provision was at the instigation of the providers. Inspectors found little initiative from employers to become involved, or to influence education and training provision to meet their needs. This has considerable implications for policy-makers seeking to promote demand-led training. Like many products and services that are bought and sold, employers' engagement in education and training was generally stimulated by those who supplied it. Yet the involvement of employers worked most successfully when employers and providers formed an effective partnership in which each recognised and valued the skills and expertise of the other. For providers, this was skill and expertise in needs analysis, teaching, training, learning and assessment. For employers, it was technical skill and expertise and an understanding of work practice within the sector.

## Notes

Between September 2009 and April 2010, inspectors visited 30 providers of work-related education and training to survey good practice in involving employers in the provision of work-related education and training for adults and young people over the age of 16. All the 30 providers had been judged to be good or outstanding at their previous inspection and had strengths in meeting learners' needs or in providing guidance and support. In addition to interviewing staff of the provider, inspectors interviewed 106 members of staff from 71 different employers. Inspectors spoke to 168 learners, and scrutinised their individual learning plans, files and portfolios. They also examined a range of course documents and teaching resources.

The survey included provision funded by the Learning and Skills Council for full-time and part-time education and training, typically at colleges, work-based learning at colleges, and independent training providers and employers.<sup>11</sup> The survey also included provision funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (Jobcentre Plus), for unemployed people and to enable disabled people to enter or remain in employment (Workstep), at colleges and with private providers. Provision in all the main sector subject areas was sampled and accounted for approximately 9,800 learners. The sample of provision visited did not include cost-recovery provision funded by employers.

## Further information

### Publications by Ofsted

*Improving progression to sustainable, unsupported employment* (080258), Ofsted, 2010; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080258](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080258).

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>11</sup> Following the closure of the Learning and Skills Council, funding responsibilities for these programmes transferred to the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency in April 2010.

## Other publications

*Success for all: reforming further education and training – our vision for the future*, DfES, 2002;

<http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=ACF9728&>.

*The Leitch review of skills: prosperity for all in the global economy*, HM Treasury, 2006; [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch\\_review\\_skills.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch_review_skills.htm).

*World class skills: implementing the Leitch review of skills in England*, DIUS, 2007; [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dius.gov.uk/reports\\_and\\_publications%20HIDDEN/leitch.aspx](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dius.gov.uk/reports_and_publications%20HIDDEN/leitch.aspx).

*World class apprenticeships; unlocking talent, building skills for all*, DIUS, 2007; [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tna/+http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/world\\_class\\_apprenticeships.pdf/](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tna/+http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/world_class_apprenticeships.pdf/).

*Ambition 2020: world class skills and jobs for the UK*, UKCES, 2009; [www.ukces.org.uk/publications-and-resources/browse-by-title/ambition-2020-world-class-skills-and-jobs-for-the-uk](http://www.ukces.org.uk/publications-and-resources/browse-by-title/ambition-2020-world-class-skills-and-jobs-for-the-uk).

## Annex A: Providers visited for this survey

Apprenticeship Training Ltd	Eastleigh
Boston College	Boston
Bracknell and Wokingham College	Bracknell
Bridgwater College	Somerset
CMS Vocational Training Ltd	Huddersfield
College of West Anglia	King's Lynn
Coventry and Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce Training Ltd	Coventry
East London Advanced Technology Training Ltd	London
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	Beverley
Four Counties Training Limited	London
Gateshead College	Gateshead
Gloucestershire Training Group Ltd	Gloucester
Hospitality Training Partnership Limited	Newport
Kidderminster College	Kidderminster
LITE (Stockport) Ltd	Stockport
Manchester Learning	Manchester
Medivet: Pet Health Education	Watford
Newham College of Further Education	London
The Oaklea Trust	Kendal
Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture	Suffolk
Oxford and Cherwell Valley College	Oxford
Pertemps Learning and Education Alliance Limited	Birmingham
Protocol Consultancy Services (Transworld Publications Services Limited)	Birmingham
Pure Innovations Limited	Stockport
The Academy Malton Ltd	Malton
The Intraining Group Limited	Newcastle Upon Tyne
TRACKSS Ltd	Whitstable
Uxbridge College	Uxbridge

Walsall College

Walsall

Warwickshire Garage and Transport Group  
Training Association

Leamington Spa

## Annex B: Sector subject areas covered by the survey

Health, public service and care	Health and social care Public services Child development and well-being
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	Animal care and veterinary science
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Engineering Manufacturing technologies Transportation operations and maintenance
Construction, planning and the built environment	Building and construction Building services Construction crafts
Information and communication technology	ICT for practitioners ICT for users
Retail and commercial enterprise	Warehousing and distribution Service enterprises Hairdressing and beauty therapy Hospitality and catering
Leisure, travel and tourism	Travel and tourism
Education and training	Direct learning support
Preparation for life and work	Foundations for learning and life Literacy and numeracy English for speakers of other languages Employability training
Business administration and law	Administration Business management Marketing and sales Customer service.