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Train to Gain Employer Evaluation: Sweep 5 Research Report

January 2010

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Table of Contents

1 Executive Summary	1
2 Introduction	13
3 Employer Evaluation: Objectives and Methodology.....	17
Objectives.....	17
Outline methodology	19
4 Profile of employers.....	23
Key findings.....	23
Introduction.....	23
Employer sector	24
Size of employer.....	25
Human resources and training objectives.....	26
Profile of broker-led employers re-contacted in Longitudinal Survey	27
Profile of Sweep 1 provider led employers	28
Combined Broker and Provider Led Sample	30
5 Triggers for employer involvement with Train to Gain	31
Key Findings.....	31
Introduction.....	32
Initial exposure to Train to Gain among Sweep 5 broker-led employers	32
Initial contact with the skills brokerage service	34
The role of training providers in skills broker-led contacts	34
Motivators for broker-led employer involvement with Train to Gain.....	34
Comparison of triggers and motivators for broker-led and provider-led employers.....	39
6 Employer satisfaction with advice and guidance service received through Train to Gain	43
Key findings.....	43
Introduction.....	44
Satisfaction with key aspects of the skills brokerage service	45
Overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service.....	48
Reasons for dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service	49
Key drivers of overall dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service.....	50
Recommending Train to Gain to other employers	52
Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service in the longer term.....	52
Comparison of the broker-led and provider-led route in terms of employer's priorities and satisfaction levels	55
Combined broker-led and provider-led overall satisfaction with the skills advice.....	61
Future demand	62

7 The impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity	63
Key findings.....	63
Introduction.....	64
The impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity in the short term.....	64
Reasons for not taking up training following contact with the Train to Gain skills broker	66
Profile of training accessed through Train to Gain.....	68
Involvement with leadership and management training.....	69
Funding of training activity	70
Contribution to wage costs	72
The impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity in the longer term	73
Comparing the impact of Train to Gain on training activity of employers accessing the training via the broker-led and the provider-led routes	75
Profile of training accessed through Train to Gain via the provider-led route	76
Funding of training accessed through Train to Gain via the provider-led route.....	79
Reasons for not taking up other training offered by provider	80
Providers' ability to cater for employers' needs and signpost to other training opportunities.....	81
8 The impact of the recession on engagement with Train to Gain and employers' views on the New Flexibilities offer for SMEs.....	83
Key findings.....	83
Introduction.....	84
The impact of the recession on employer views on training as a business priority	85
The impact of the recession on recent training expenditure	85
The importance of financial support through Train to Gain in the recession	87
Awareness of the new flexibilities in the Train to Gain offer for SMEs	90
Employer views and take-up of the new flexibilities in the Train to Gain offer for SMEs.....	91
The impact of the recession on employers' engagement with Train to Gain in the long term.....	92
Comparison of the impact of the recession on employers accessing Train to Gain via the broker-led and the provider-led route.....	93
9 The additional impact and value of Train to Gain in influencing employer training activity	96
Key findings.....	96
Using the Employer Evaluation data to assess 'additionality'	97
The additional impact of the skills brokerage service on employer training activity	98
Comparison of the additional impact of the Train to Gain service on training activity for broker-led and provider-led employers	103
10 Employer satisfaction with training provision accessed through Train to Gain	106
Key findings.....	106
Introduction.....	106
Satisfaction with individual aspects of training provision among new-user broker-led employers	107
Changes in satisfaction with training provision over time	110

Comparisons with satisfaction among provider-led employers.....	111
Combined broker-led and provider-led overall satisfaction score.....	113
11 The impact of Train to Gain on employer performance	114
Key findings.....	114
Introduction.....	115
Impact from the skills brokerage service in the short term.....	115
Benefits arising from Train to Gain training.....	116
The impact of Train to Gain on employer training culture and organisational performance in the longer term	122
Negative impacts on business from Train to Gain training	127
Impact of Train to Gain among provider-led employers.....	127
12 Conclusions and key messages	133
Annex A: Methodological Details	137
Annex B: References and Endnotes.....	145

List of Figures

Figure 1: The sector profile of employers in contact with Train to Gain skills brokerage service, compared with the business population in England.....	24
Figure 2: Profile of employers followed up for the Longitudinal Survey.....	28
Figure 3: Profile of Sweep 1 provider-led vs. Sweep 5 broker-led employers.....	29
Figure 4: Profile of broker and provider-led sample combined.....	30
Figure 5: Channels through which Sweep 5 broker-led employers first heard of the Train to Gain service.....	33
Figure 6: Factors attracting employers to the Train to Gain service – Sweep 5 broker-led employers...	35
Figure 7: Importance of subsidised Level 2 and Level 3 training, contribution to wage costs and Leadership and Management training to decision to get involved with Train to Gain.....	37
Figure 8: Proportion aware of Train to Gain involvement with their training, and the stage at which they became aware of this.....	40
Figure 9: Mean satisfaction scores for key elements of the skills brokerage service.....	45
Figure 10: Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service – Longitudinal Survey 3.....	53
Figure 11: Mean importance scores for key measures of the skills advice and guidance received – provider-led engagements.....	56
Figure 12: Mean satisfaction scores for key measures of advice and guidance received from the provider – provider-led engagements.....	58
Figure 13: Take-up of Train to Gain training in the short term – Sweep 5 broker-led employers.....	65
Figure 14: Reasons for not taking up training through Train to Gain – Sweep 5 broker-led employers....	67
Figure 15: The proportion of employers accessing training at different levels in the short term as a result of discussion with a Train to Gain skills broker – Sweep 5 broker-led employers.....	69
Figure 16: Take-up of training through Train to Gain in the short and long term.....	73
Figure 17: Additional training activity through Train to Gain following the initial survey.....	74
Figure 18: The proportion of provider-led employers accessing training at different levels.....	77
Figure 19: The occupational profile of Train to Gain trainees – provider-led employers.....	78
Figure 20: Change in expenditure on training in the previous six months.....	86
Figure 21: Importance of financial support for employers negatively affected by the recession in their decision to get involved with Train to Gain.....	88
Figure 22: Expected change in future expenditure on training in the coming two years.....	90
Figure 23: Employer views of the new 'bite sized' learning package.....	91
Figure 24: Change in training expenditure in the previous six months and in the coming two years – Sweep 1 provider-led employers.....	94
Figure 25: Quantitative and qualitative impact on training activity among Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up training through Train to Gain.....	100
Figure 26: Quantitative and qualitative impact on training activity among employers who had taken up training through Train to Gain – comparison of broker-led and provider-led employers.....	104
Figure 27: Satisfaction with individual aspects of training accessed through Train to Gain – Sweep 5 broker-led employers.....	107
Figure 28: Overall satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain.....	109
Figure 29: Longitudinal changes in satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain.....	110
Figure 30: Impact of Organisational Needs Analysis.....	116
Figure 31: Benefits of Train to Gain training in the short term – Sweep 5 broker-led employers.....	117
Figure 32: Effect of Train to Gain broker-led training on four key financial or operational benefits.....	120
Figure 33: Longer-term impact of Train to Gain on training culture.....	123
Figure 34: Extent to which Train to Gain training has impacted on employees' existing skills, and extent to which it has enabled employees to develop new skills.....	124
Figure 35: The proportion of employers offering pay rises and promotions to employees participating in Train to Gain training.....	125
Figure 36: Proportion of employers experiencing benefits of Train to Gain training at the initial interview and the follow-up interview.....	126
Figure 37: Impact of training and skills needs assessments for Sweep 1 Provider-led Employers.....	129

List of Tables

Table 1:	Structure of the employer evaluation	21
Table 2:	Change in the sector profile of employers who had initial contact with the Train to Gain skills brokerage services between January 2007 and March 2009	25
Table 3:	Change in the size profile of employers using the skills brokerage service, January 2007 to March 2009	26
Table 4:	Mean satisfaction scores for key elements of the skills brokerage service – time series comparison	47
Table 5:	Overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service – time series analysis	48
Table 6:	Reasons for dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service	50
Table 7:	Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service – time series comparison.....	54
Table 8:	Change in overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service in the long term	55
Table 9:	Employer satisfaction with the guidance and advice received – broker-led and provider-led engagements comparison	59
Table 10:	Reasons for dissatisfaction with the guidance and advice received from training providers..	60
Table 11:	Employer satisfaction with the guidance and advice received – combined broker-led and provider-led engagements	62
Table 12:	Commitment to and take-up of training in the short term, as a result of discussions with a Train to Gain skills broker, by evaluation sweep.....	66
Table 13:	Sweep 5 broker-led employers: Commitment to and take-up of training in the short term as a result of discussions with a Train to Gain skills broker, by employer size	66
Table 14:	The proportion of employers accessing subsidies for training conducted in the short term as a result of discussion with a Train to Gain skills broker	71
Table 15:	The proportion of employers accessing subsidies for training – comparison of the provider-led and broker-led routes	79
Table 16:	Training requirements unmet by providers – provider-led employers.....	81
Table 17:	Summary of additionality effects associated with the Train to Gain skills brokerage service amongst employers committed to training through Train to Gain.....	101
Table 18 :	Summary of additionality effects associated with the Train to Gain service – comparison of provider-led and broker-led employers	105
Table 19:	Comparison of mean satisfaction with specific aspects of training accessed through Train to Gain for Sweep 1 provider-led and Sweep 5 broker-led employers	112
Table 20:	Business benefits of Train to Gain in the short term – differences between Sweep 5 broker-led employers and Sweep 1 provider-led employers.....	131
Table B.1	The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the employer population – New user broker-led employer Sweeps 1 to 5	138
Table B.1A	The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the employer population – New Users Sweep 4.....	139
Table B.2	Achieved longitudinal survey interviews as a proportion of employers previously agreeing to ongoing involvement in the employer evaluation	140
Table B.3	The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Longitudinal Survey 1.....	140
Table B.4	The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Longitudinal Survey 2.....	141
Table B.5	The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Longitudinal Survey 3.....	141
Table B.6	The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Sweep 1 of the provider-led employer survey.....	143

1 Executive Summary

Background

- 1.1 Train to Gain has become a cornerstone of the Government's skills policy in recent years. First launched in April 2006, and then fully rolled out in August of that year, Train to Gain is a national service for businesses that provides support for employers to identify their training needs and to source appropriate training solutions that enhance the skills of their workforce and their overall business performance. The service also aims to encourage employers to invest more in training and skills development for the benefit of their employees. To ensure that these objectives are being met, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned an ongoing Employer Evaluation of the Train to Gain service, which has been conducted by IFF Research on a twice yearly basis since 2007.
- 1.2 The Employer Evaluation was originally established to assess employer views on the Train to Gain skills brokerage service. This report focuses on the last group of employers to use the skills brokerage service, which ended in March 2009. From April, the Regional Development Agency (RDA) integrated brokerage service delivered by Business Link assumed responsibility for providing skills advice to employers interested in Train to Gain. This report provides key messages from the evaluation of the skills brokerage service which highlight how Train to Gain can continue to support employers moving forward, in the context of the current recession.
- 1.3 The report also compares the experiences of employers using the skills brokerage service ('broker-led' employers) and those who accessed Train to Gain training directly through a training provider during the same period, without any mediating contact with the skills brokerage service ('provider-led' employers). It is known that training providers field around two thirds of all Train to Gain learners, and as such the views of employers they engage are an important component of a full and rounded picture of the impact and additional value of the Train to Gain service. The report looks at the outcomes of training for both groups, but also compares employer experiences of the skills brokerage service with provider-led employer views on any pre-training advice, assessment and guidance services received from their training provider. It examines whether there is evidence that an independent, impartial advisory service would have provided additional benefits to provider-led employers.
- 1.4 Over the last year or so there has been a strong increase in demand for Train to Gain services and in learner numbers. This report provides recommendations about how future sustainable development of the service might be achieved in a way that maximises value and additionality.

Introduction

- 1.5 This report details the findings of telephone surveys among three discrete employer cohorts, conducted between June and August 2009 by IFF Research.
- 1.6 The first research element was the latest **new user 'sweep' (Sweep 5) of broker-led employers, who had an initial contact with a Train to Gain skills broker between November 2008 and March 2009**. This initial contact could have been a single telephone call, a more detailed skills analysis carried out by the skills broker, or a more sustained relationship eventually leading up to the employer taking up the training opportunities discussed with the skills broker. All 3,750 employer contacts included in this research element had been exclusively generated by skills brokerage organisations.
- 1.7 It is important to bear in mind throughout the report that not all of these Sweep 5 broker-led employers took up training as a result of contact with the skills brokerage service. As an objective of Train to Gain is to encourage a culture of investment in training by employers, throughout the evaluation we have looked at the impact of training undertaken by employers that was prompted by the skills broker, even if paid for by the employer themselves. Therefore, not all of the training activity amongst broker-led employers described in this report as having been taken up as a result of the Train to Gain service has been subsidised through the Train to Gain funding stream.
- 1.8 Throughout the report, time series comparisons are made between the situation as measured at Sweep 5 of the broker-led evaluation, and the trends evident across earlier sweeps (referring to employers initially in contact with the skills brokerage service over the period January 2007 to October 2008).
- 1.9 The second research element discussed in this report is a **longitudinal survey, which involved re-contacting employers who first came in contact with the skills brokerage service between November 2007 and April 2008** and who were previously interviewed for Sweep 3 of the broker-led evaluation in summer 2008. A total of 1,530 employers were followed up (for the first time) at this Longitudinal Survey 3 in order to allow a more effective tracking of how employer views on Train to Gain, and the impact of the service, evolve over time.
- 1.10 A third element was added to the Employer Evaluation which involved **employers who accessed Train to Gain directly through a college or other training provider**. This is the first survey of the main Employer Evaluation that has focused on **provider-led employers (Sweep 1)**. These employers had not had any contact with the skills brokerage service. In contrast to the Sweep 5 broker-led employers, all of the Sweep 1 provider-led employers had taken up training, and all had had that training funded through Train to Gain. All of the provider-led employers had employees start some training under Train to Gain between **November 2008 and March 2009**.

- 1.11 The following summary provides headline findings from the research, starting with key themes from Sweep 5 of the broker-led employer evaluation and the longitudinal survey. Key comparisons with the experiences of provider-led employers are also highlighted. Finally, we provide discussion of the lessons that can be derived with regard to maximising the value and impact of Train to Gain in the context of the current economic climate, restrictions on the Train to Gain budget and the intent to re-prioritise existing funds within Train to Gain to meet shifting priorities, as set out in the recently published National Skills Strategy.

Successes in encouraging employer engagement with training

- 1.12 The skills brokerage service has been successful in encouraging employers to engage with new training opportunities for staff. Approaching two thirds (63 per cent) of the Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had an initial contact with the skills brokerage service between November 2008 and March 2009 had committed to some training activity as a direct result of their discussions with the skills broker, by the time of survey in summer 2009. These 'committed' employers had staff already enrolled on training, or had training scheduled to start. The Sweep 5 figure is higher than found at Sweep 4 of the broker-led employer evaluation (61 per cent) and approaching the highest commitment rate which was recorded at Sweep 2 (65 per cent).
- 1.13 Sweep 5 of the broker-led employer survey indicates that future demand and re-engagement rates with Train to Gain are likely to be high. Over three-quarters of employers (80 per cent) said they would be likely or very likely to use the Train to Gain service again in the future. The evidence from the Longitudinal Survey shows that a third of those employers who had taken up training at the time of the first interview (at Sweep 3) went on to arrange further training over the following year. One in five employers who initially had no training scheduled reported that they arranged some training under Train to Gain in the subsequent 12 months.
- 1.14 Sweep 5 paints a picture of a skills brokerage service increasingly successful in encouraging a culture of employer **investment** in staff training and development. Half of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who accessed training had made at least some contribution to the costs of this training (51 per cent, up from 44 percent in Sweep 4). This is an encouraging sign given the recessionary climate and the continued strategy of using joint investment between employers and government to drive up skills, building on the successes of Train to Gain in boosting attainment at Level 2 (see the National Skills Strategy, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009, p.39).

Employer views of the skills brokerage service

- 1.15 Through the skills brokerage service, Train to Gain has been delivering effective support to employers that has been rated as relevant and responsive, and has been adding value to employers' understanding of training and development issues. Amongst employers who initially used the service between November 2008 and March 2009, more than three quarters (77 per cent) were satisfied with the service received from their skills broker (against the benchmark score of six or more on the ten point satisfaction scale). Three-fifths (59 per cent) were 'very satisfied' with the skills brokerage service (giving a satisfaction score of eight or more). Note that this reflects employer satisfaction with the service received from their skills broker, asked separately from questions on satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain and the provider delivering this.
- 1.16 This represents a continuation of the level of satisfaction seen at Sweeps 2, 3 and 4 (78, 77 and 78 per cent respectively), but represents a decline in satisfaction compared to Sweep 1, referring to employers initially using the skills brokerage service in early 2007 (80 per cent).
- 1.17 Four in five Sweep 5 broker-led employers (80 per cent) reported that they would be likely to recommend the Train to Gain service to a business colleague outside their organisation, and half (48 per cent) were very likely to do so. There has been no significant variation in the rates of advocacy across the evaluation – in Sweep 4 the same proportion of employers (80 per cent) said they would recommend the service.
- 1.18 The proportion of employers actively **dissatisfied** with the skills brokerage service (satisfaction score of between 1 to 4 out of ten) has increased across the evaluation, from 11 per cent at Sweep 1, to 13 per cent at Sweep 4 and 15 per cent at Sweep 5. In order to arrest this trend and to improve services going forward, it is important to understand the reasons for concern amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers who were dissatisfied with the skills brokerage service, key of which were:
- A lack of contact and communication between skills broker and employers (43 per cent);
 - The perceived irrelevance of the advice or training options provided by skills brokers (cited by 25 per cent of dissatisfied employers, up from 20 per cent at Sweep 4).
 - Issues around funding (cited by 19 per cent of dissatisfied employers, up from 9 per cent at Sweep 4), including complaints about a lack of funding or about training being too expensive, and misinformation on funding issues.

1.19 The factors that are most likely to determine overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers were, in descending order of significance:

- the skills broker's ability to identify potential funding to support employer training activity;
- the speed with which the skills broker is seen to carry out agreed follow-up actions;
- the ease with which the employer is able to get in touch with the skills broker when they want to have a discussion; and
- the capability of the skills broker in terms of translating company needs into an action plan.

1.20 Therefore it is clear that the key performance indicators for any Train to Gain advisory service should relate to the matching of employers to relevant financial support and management of their expectations in this regard, creating effective plans for training that fully reflect the organisation's priorities, and ensuring that employers are continually supported with regular contact, and that requests are followed up.

1.21 Further highlighting the importance of efficiency and responsiveness, over one fifth of Sweep 5 broker-led employers (23 per cent) said the process of accessing advice and training through Train to Gain had taken longer than they had expected. This is slightly more employers than in previous sweeps, with Sweeps 2, 3 and 4 having 19 per cent of employers with this opinion. Given that the ability of the skills broker to carry out agreed follow up actions is a key driver of satisfaction with the service, it is important that as demand for Train to Gain increases, the resourcing of advisory services follows suit.

The impact of the recession on employer demand for support

1.22 Although, on balance, general training expenditure among the vast majority of broker-led employers has remained stable, there has been a significant increase since Sweep 4 in employers who have had to cut their expenditure in the short term (11 per cent from 8 per cent in Sweep 4), and an increase in those who attribute their reduced training expenditure to the recession (10 per cent of all employers at Sweep 5 vs. 6 per cent at Sweep 4). Employers who had reduced their training expenditure due to the recession were less likely to engage with Train to Gain training following contact with the skills brokerage service.

- 1.23 Nevertheless, there are encouraging indications of the positive role that Train to Gain skills brokers exert in encouraging employers to continue to arrange and invest in training given the wider context of other studies reporting a fall in training activity amongst UK employers (for example, see Alliance SSC, 2009). The findings of the Sweep 5 broker-led evaluation show that training levels under Train to Gain are holding up under the recession, with more than two in five employers taking up training under Train to Gain at the last two sweeps of the survey (46 per cent at Sweep 5 and 43 per cent at Sweep 4).
- 1.24 It would seem that many employers are looking to the financial support available through Train to Gain to develop their training further in the recession. Approaching half of both broker-led employers (45 per cent) who had received full subsidies for training said that they would have been unlikely to undertake this training without this financial support (an increase on the Sweep 4 figure of 38 per cent). Even where employers did report that they would have been likely to arrange similar training in the absence of Train to Gain, the financial support available through Train to Gain has been important in allowing them to train additional staff or access a higher level or quality of training as a result of the service.
- 1.25 Furthermore, across the Sweep 5 broker-led employer cohort as a whole, a key theme emerging is the increasing priority of financial support in employer decisions about training.
- Findings from Sweep 5 reveal an increasing proportion of broker-led employers being attracted to Train to Gain because of the availability for subsidies for training. Approaching half of Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers (46 per cent) reported (on an unprompted basis) that their decision to get involved with Train to Gain was informed by their interest in accessing financial support, compared to 41 per cent in Sweep 4 and 38 per cent in Sweep 3.
 - The ability of the skills broker to identify financial support for training activity has become a more important driver of employer satisfaction.
 - Dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service is more often attributed to the expected level of financial support not being available or misinformation being received about funding for training (19 per cent, compared to 9 per cent at Sweep 4).
- 1.26 When Sweep 4 employers were asked for the first time on a prompted basis whether concerns about the economic climate had had any influence on their decisions about taking up training, almost three in 10 of those employers who had decided against engagement with training (28 per cent) agreed that this was the case. In Sweep 5 this figure increased to more than a third (35 per cent).
- 1.27 Many of those Sweep 5 broker-led employers who did not take up training agreed that this was because staff did not meet the eligibility criteria for receipt of subsidised

training (36 per cent). In addition, more than a quarter (29 per cent) decided against the training because it was felt to be too expensive.

- 1.28 A quarter of broker-led employers were aware of the flexible 'bite sized' training offer for SMEs, introduced to support employers during the recession. Most eligible employers believe it to be a good offer (84 per cent) and two thirds (63 per cent) have taken it up or would consider taking it up. There has been an increase in the take-up of the Leadership and Management training offer under Train to Gain, from one in nine (12 per cent) of the broker-led employers at Sweep 4 to one in five (19 per cent) at Sweep 5.

The impact of Train to Gain on employers

- 1.29 Amongst Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers who had already taken up training at the first survey interview (a few months after the initial skills brokerage contact), over nine in ten (96 per cent) were already reporting some benefits from this training. Over three-quarters reported that Train to Gain training had equipped staff with valuable job-related skills which had resulted in an increase in their performance (77 per cent).
- 1.30 Employers who have accessed Train to Gain training were also likely to report a positive impact of this training on the operation of the organisation as a whole, even in the short-term only a few months after the initial contact with Train to Gain. Seven in ten (70 per cent) felt that the training had improved the day-to-day operation of the company or organisation. There has been an increase at Sweep 5 in the proportion of employers feeling confident that the training will contribute to longer-term competitiveness (up from 66 per cent at Sweep 4 to the same high level as seen at Sweep 3 – 68 per cent).
- 1.31 Over half of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up training reported an increase in product or service quality (56 per cent) and in staff productivity (54 per cent). As in previous sweeps, there were fewer employers reporting that Train to Gain had increased sales and turnover or profit margins in the short-term. Four in ten employers training (41 per cent) agreed that the training accessed through Train to Gain had helped the business cope with the recession.
- 1.32 When broker-led employers were resurveyed as part of Longitudinal Survey 3 (13 to 22 months after their initial contact with the skills broker) significantly more employers reported that Train to Gain training had had a beneficial effect on their organisation in the long term. The most marked increases can be seen in relation to quality standards (from 60 per cent at Sweep 3 to 79 per cent at Longitudinal Survey 3) and improved profit margins (17 per cent to 26 per cent).
- 1.33 Whilst these findings confirm the relevance and benefits of Train to Gain training, a key focus of the evaluation has been on measuring the value of the skills brokerage service in terms of encouraging and enabling employers to undertake **additional** training, over and above that which could have or would have taken place otherwise.

- 1.34 One third (34 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had committed to training through Train to Gain had had some staff involved with formal, vocational qualifications independent of Train to Gain previously, and one fifth of committed employers (18 per cent) said that it was 'very likely' that they would have arranged *similar* training for staff in any case, without the involvement of Train to Gain. However, in the majority of cases where these employers have taken up training through Train to Gain, they were able to train more staff, a greater range of staff or access higher quality or higher level training than they would have done otherwise.
- 1.35 Indeed, amongst all Sweep 5 broker-led employers committed to training, the associated level of quantitative or qualitative additionality stands at 76 per cent. The evidence suggests that total additionality increases in the long term with the move from scheduled training to actual enrolment and with employers taking up further training opportunities; Longitudinal Survey 3 shows that total additionality amongst Sweep 3 broker-led employers committed to Train to Gain training increased from 80 per cent at the initial interview, to 91 per cent a year down the line, 13 to 22 months after the initial contact with the skills brokerage service.
- 1.36 In terms of the level of additionality of Level 2 training amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers, of the c.45,400 employees participating in Train to Gain Level 2 training by the time of survey, only around one in eight (12 per cent - c. 5,500) would have been likely to take this qualification without Train to Gain, according to their employer.
- 1.37 However, total additionality has continued to fall in Sweep 5 (the 76 per cent Sweep 5 figure representing a decline from 78 per cent at Sweep 4 and a peak of 82 per cent at Sweep 2). As highlighted throughout this report, the importance employers place on financial support for training has increased in the recession, and this may be contributing to the proportion of employers deciding to 'move planned training provision over' to Train to Gain in order to benefit from financial support.

Comparing broker-led and provider-led engagement

- 1.38 A key issue explored in the provider-led employer evaluation was the extent to which these employers receive a service which adds value to their understanding of their organisations skill needs and of potential training solutions. In this context, the evaluation assessed the extent to which provider-led employers receive analysis, advice and guidance to help them identify needs and solutions from their provider prior to training, analogous to that received by broker-led employers as part of the skills brokerage service.

- 1.39 Just over half (54 per cent) of Sweep 1 provider-led employers reported that they had discussed in detail their skills and training needs with their training provider, receiving some form of Organisational Needs Analysis or Skills Needs Assessment from their provider in advance of taking up Train to Gain training. Nine in ten provider-led employers (89 per cent) receiving this advice and guidance said that it had made them more aware of relevant training opportunities. Significantly more provider-led employers felt that the advice received had helped them to identify skills currently missing from their workforce; three quarters of provider-led employers (76 per cent) agreed, compared to just 56 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had an ONA.
- 1.40 The large proportion of provider-led employers who said that the organisational/skills needs assessment from their provider had *not* led to them considering different types of training for staff (53 per cent) suggests that these employers are in general approaching their training provider with a pre-identified need for training, rather than for guidance on what type of training would be appropriate. This is backed up by the fact that provider-led employers are more likely to take up training designed to lead to a qualification at Level 2 or above (72 per cent vs. 51 per cent of broker-led employers taking up training). The evaluation supports the rationale for a division of labour between the skills brokerage service, which will reach out to employers more reluctant to train, and training providers, which offer a good service especially to those employers who have already been actively looking to address an identified training need.
- 1.41 All Sweep 1 provider-led employers were asked to rate their satisfaction with guidance and advice services received from their provider, and general aspects to do with the responsiveness and efficiency of the provider in managing their relationship (satisfaction with elements of the actual training was asked separately). Overall, almost nine in ten (87 per cent) of those provider-led employers were satisfied with these services overall. Almost three quarters were very satisfied (73 per cent), giving a score of at least 8 out of 10. These overall satisfaction scores are exactly the same as those given by broker-led employers taking up training, when rating satisfaction with the skills brokerage service.

1.42 Therefore, it would seem that provider-led employers are as likely as broker-led employers to report that they have received effective and responsive advisory services as part of their engagement with Train to Gain. It is true, however, that in some aspects there are advantages to the skills brokerage service:

- Employers engaged into Train to Gain by a skills broker were significantly more satisfied than provider-led employers to say that their advisor's ability to translate employer needs into an action plan (mean score of 7.75 vs. 7.63);
- One in seven provider-led employers (15 per cent) reported having some training needs or need for financial support for which their training provider was unable to offer any solution. Three in five (60 per cent) of these employers stated that their provider was not able to suggest where they could get further advice.
- In terms of delivering value through Train to Gain, provider-led employers were found to be significantly less likely to make at least some contribution to the training costs (21 per cent) compared to broker-led employers (51 per cent) (although this may be linked to the level 2 entitlement, given that a greater proportion of provider-led employers take up formal qualifications at Level 2, and for lower-skilled occupations, than broker-led employers). This is despite provider-led employers being less likely than broker-led employers to report reduced training expenditure generally as a result of the recession.

1.43 Estimates of the total additional value of Train to Gain training for provider-led employers and the comparable group of Sweep 5 broker-led employers (those taking up training through Train to Gain) are very similar (95 per cent vs. 93 per cent). Provider-led employers show a greater incidence of pure additionality (40 per cent vs. 29 per cent). However, Sweep 1 provider-led employers are more likely to say that they could have arranged training at Level 2 without the intervention of Train to Gain; provider-led employers report that as many as a third (33 per cent) of employees who undertook a Level 2 course through Train to Gain would have undertaken this qualification in any case (compared with a figure of 12 per cent for the Sweep 5 broker-led cohort).

1.44 Sweep 1 provider-led employers tended to see similar benefits from Train to Gain training as the Sweep 5 broker-led employers. Provider-led employers were more likely to agree that the training has helped them to meet their legal requirement to train staff (75 per cent, compared with 57 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers). Train to Gain does not fund mandatory or legally required training per se however the intricacies of this may mean that where a license to practise is not required it may be possible to fund qualifications. They were slightly less likely to feel that Train to Gain had helped their business cope with the economic downturn and financial crisis (37 per cent compared to 41 per cent of broker-led employers training through Train to Gain) and that this had helped put their business in a position to capitalise on any opportunities an economic upturn may present, again slightly less than amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers (61 per cent vs. 66 per cent).

Lessons for the future: Maximising the impact Train to Gain

- 1.45 In conclusion, the Train to Gain Employer Evaluation has found evidence of continued high performance across both skills brokerage organisations and training providers in encouraging employers to engage with and invest in beneficial training. This training has been in most cases more wide ranging and/or of higher quality than training which employers would have undertaken otherwise. Train to Gain has enabled employers to offer additional training for staff at Level 2 that would have been unlikely to have been achieved in the absence of the intervention.
- 1.46 This report has shown an increasing demand for financial support and subsidised training from employers. At the same time, there are restrictions on the overall Train to Gain budget and the intent to re-prioritise existing funds within Train to Gain to meet shifting priorities, as set out in the National Skills Strategy, published November 2009 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009, p.67). Given these pressures, it will be important to consider how resources can be best managed whilst maintaining the overall contribution the service is making. The findings of the Employer Evaluation suggest several ways in which the impact of the service might be maximised.
- 1.47 The research has revealed a persistent minority of employers who would have been likely to undertake similar training in the absence of the Train to Gain intervention, and can perhaps therefore be considered as 'deadweight' in the system. The high proportion of employers taking up training through Train to Gain who have a recent history of arranging training for staff suggests that the service could be targeting support more effectively towards employers with less ability to train employees, perhaps through more means testing of employers.
- 1.48 Another factor which could contribute to maximising the impact of the overall Train to Gain service would be to encourage more employers who have been in contact with the skills brokerage service or a training provider about Train to Gain to invest in training. This can be achieved through presenting the business case for training and encouraging employers to measure this in their own organisation. Encouraging employers to make their own investment in training activity is not an unrealistic ambition; even given the current economic climate, the proportion of employers in contact with the skills brokerage service who went on to make a contribution to funding additional training has increased in Sweep 5. This fits with the objective embedded in the National Skills Strategy (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009, p19) to increase the volume of training funded through a matched contribution from the employer, and with the recommendations of the National Audit Office report on Train to Gain (National Audit Office, 2009) which called for a greater level of employer investment.

- 1.49 Increasing the additional value of the Train to Gain service also relies on making sure that the training that employers do access has the optimum level of impact on their organisation. This means ensuring that the training is bespoke to the employer and has a clearly defined business case. Both providers and skills brokers have a role to play in helping employers assess the impact of training on an on-going basis, to ensure continuing relevance. The progress towards the National Skills Strategy mandate of ensuring that the training funded through Train to Gain meets the priority skills needs in key growth sectors should be monitored going forward.
- 1.50 A final area for consideration relates to the communication and positioning of the expanded support offer within Train to Gain, including the offer of contributions to wage costs. The messages on this do not seem to have made much impact on the employers in contact with Train to Gain in late 2008/early 2009 – few say that this influenced their decision to get involved with the service. At the same time, there is demand for these types of support. Therefore the decision needs to be taken whether efforts should be made to increase employer awareness, given that this would be likely to lead to substantial increases in demand that may not be able to be met. The decision has already been taken to end other interim flexibilities introduced in 2009 to help smaller businesses through the recession, such as fully funded ‘bite-size’ unit and short qualifications and repeat qualification at Levels 2 and 3. Whilst these have been shown to be popular, the National Skills Strategy has set out the intention to reallocate funding for these elements to support skills development in the sectors which are seen as key for the growth of the economy.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 One of the key aims of the Government's strategy to improve skills is to deliver benefits to businesses and the wider economy – by raising skills levels of the workforce in order to boost productivity and the competitiveness of the UK market place in the international context – and also to deliver social benefits to individuals and communities – by helping unskilled or low-skilled learners to gain a basic platform of skills needed for sustainable and productive employment. The White Paper *'21st Century Skills – Realising our Potential'* (HM Treasury, 2003) specified a number of policies designed to increase such skills, and focused specifically on the need for more adults to be qualified to a Full Level 2 qualification.
- 2.2 The importance of raising the skills base amongst the workforce was further emphasised by the *'Leitch Review of Skills'* (HM Treasury, 2006), which made a strong case for up-skilling at Level 1 and 2 in order to enhance productivity and the UK's ability to compete in the globalised market place. The Leitch review also argued for a radical change in the operation of the vocational education and training (VET) system, taking issue with previous approaches to delivery that have been too 'supply driven' and not sufficiently responsive to employer demands and skills needs.
- 2.3 Following on from these publications, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) spelled out a set of new priorities in *'Our Statement of Priorities: Better skills, Better jobs, Better lives'* published in November 2007 (LSC, 2007). The key performance targets include:
- 79% of working-age adults to be qualified to at least Level 2 by 2011, and 56% to at least Level 3;
 - More than 90% of working-age adults to be qualified to at least Level 2 by 2020.
- 2.4 The introduction of the Train to Gain service represents an important innovation within the context of these strategic priorities and the ideas for policy delivery emanating from the Leitch review. The service is designed take a demand-led, holistic approach to training by considering the wider business needs of employers and equipping individuals with portable skills and qualifications that are of real value on the labour market. One of the key elements of Train to Gain is the flexible nature of its funding and delivery regime under which training is organised in order to meet the needs of the economy. Employers can access Train to Gain via a dedicated skills broker – who advises businesses on their skills needs, helps sourcing appropriate training solutions, and recommends training providers – or through a college or training provider who offer training supported by Train to Gain.

- 2.5 Introduced in April 2006, and fully rolled out in August of that year, Train to Gain is a national service for employers that provides help for businesses in identifying and sourcing training that will improve the skills of their workforce and their business performance. The Train to Gain service provides funding support aimed at increasing the basic skills base (below Level 2) and the attainment rates at Full Level 2. Through Train to Gain all businesses now have access to full funding for:
- Basic skills support at all levels;
 - First Full Level 2 qualifications;
 - First Full Level 3 qualifications for 19-25 year olds or suitable candidates who do not already hold a Level 2 that go directly to studying Level 3 qualifications;
 - Some first Level 4 qualifications for 19-25 year olds who do not already hold a Level 3 qualification;
 - Some funding for people who already have qualifications at Full Level 2 and 3 for particular additional qualification types.
- 2.6 Train to Gain also aims to encourage employers to invest in the development of the skills and qualifications of their employees. It envisages a shared investment between the employer and Government for:
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications at all levels;
 - Level 3 and Level 4 learners who are not eligible for full funding;
 - Apprenticeships;
 - Support towards the cost of leadership and management development for businesses between 10 and 250 employees.
- 2.7 After the first year since the national roll-out, the LSC introduced a number of substantial adjustments to the Train to Gain service which were announced in *'Train to Gain – A Plan for Growth: November 2007–July 2011'* (LSC, 2007). The new design outlined plans to achieve growth through the provision of 'new flexibilities', designed to make the service more attractive and economically valuable to employers by expanding the scope of the training opportunities available under Train to Gain and extending the eligibility criteria for subsidised training to a broader range of employers and employees. The Plan for Growth announced a number of important changes, including:
- Launching a new offer to employers in order to engage more businesses in training by way of promoting the Skills Pledge and mobilising the support of key partners, including the National Employer Service and Sector Skills Councils;
 - Building a stronger network of Train to Gain providers, who would be fully integrated into the demand-led system and deliver training solutions that meet employer skills needs;

- Lifting performance and ensure consistency across the LSC regions: and
- Ensuring clearer communication and raising awareness of the benefits of Train to Gain for employers in order to promote the service and the training opportunities available at all levels.

2.8 Since the publication of the Plan for Growth in November 2007, a series of further enhancements and flexibilities have been introduced to the Train to Gain service, including:

- An expansion of the qualifications funded by Train to Gain, which broadened the scope of available qualifications beyond Level 2 and allowed some repeat qualifications at Level 2 or Level 3;
- A focus on basic skills improvement for adult learners, helping them to achieve full functional literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);
- Allowing for additional flexibilities to support small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 250 staff, including access to funding for Leadership and Management training and smaller, 'bite-sized' training units or modules in subjects such as business improvement, team working and communications, sales and marketing, customer service, new product design, cash flow and management;
- Extending the Leadership & Management offer from 10-250 full time equivalents to 5-250 full time equivalents;
- An extension of Train to Gain into parts of the public sector, using public service compacts to increase the take-up of training;
- The integration of the Train to Gain skills brokerage service with regional Business Link organisations, which is intended to link discussions about skills needs more closely to wider business support services and to create a streamlined one-stop-shop for employers seeking advice and support.

2.9 Supporting employers in the context of the current recession, and helping them to prepare for the eventual recovery, has become one of the key ambitions of the Train to Gain service. Some of the available evidence from previous recessions suggests that economic downturns tend to drive down employers' investments in training over the short term; over the longer term they slow the process of skills accumulation (Felstead and Green, 1994). There is, however, mixed evidence to date as to the precise effects of the current recession on training activities and training expenditure. Many of the recent studies show that employers are cutting down on any 'discretionary' spend on training, i.e. training not considered to be indispensable to the operation of their business, as part of their cost cutting measures taken as a result of the recession (Alliance SSC, 2009).

2.10 Other studies, however, argue that UK companies tend to react in a differential way to the dynamic and complex challenges posed by the recession (UKCES, 2009). Some businesses are maintaining their overall training expenditure, but are

now directing their training budgets more carefully towards specific training needs, qualifications or levels of training, and occupations trained (CBI, 2009). There are also indications that some companies may be investing more in training out of strategic and long-term considerations, which are designed to develop new skills in order to improve competitiveness and prepare businesses for the eventual economic upturn (CIPD, 2009).

- 2.11 In this context, the training advice and financial support offered through Train to Gain is proving to be of vital importance in order to help employers through the recession and to keep up overall training levels which would otherwise be likely to decrease due to a lack of funding.

3 Employer Evaluation: Objectives and Methodology

Objectives

- 3.1 Since its inception, the Train to Gain service has been subject to an on-going evaluation to assess stakeholder views on the service and to assess its overall impact on training and skills development. A key part of this evaluation has been the research carried out by IFF Research for the LSC which has assessed employer experiences of Train to Gain, and the additional impact of Train to Gain on the training strategies and business performance of these employers. The Employer Evaluation has been undertaken on a twice-yearly basis since 2007.
- 3.2 This report presents the findings of three discrete employer surveys conducted as part of Sweep 5 of the Employer Evaluation in summer 2009. The first cohort included 'new users' of the Train to Gain skills brokerage service, who will henceforth be referred to as 'broker-led' employers. These employers had their initial contact with the skills brokerage service between November 2008 and March 2009. It is important to note that this initial contact could have taken various forms, ranging from a simple telephone call, to a more detailed skills analysis carried out by the skills broker, or to a more sustained relationship which eventually leads up to the employer taking up the training opportunities discussed with the skills broker. Therefore, not all broker-led employers surveyed for this research element had actually taken up training. The report discusses findings from the fifth sweep of the broker-led employer evaluation, and also highlights any significant trends across the five sweeps. The key objectives of this research element were to address the following research questions:
- how employers first heard of and became involved with Train to Gain, and their expectations and motivations for becoming involved;
 - the extent to which they found their skills broker to be responsive and accessible;
 - employer views on the impartiality and relevance of advice given, and the skills brokers' knowledge of potential training and funding opportunities;
 - the impact Train to Gain has had on the ability and willingness of employers to engage with training and on the numbers of employees trained;
 - employer satisfaction with the training provision accessed through Train to Gain, and with the training providers responsible for delivery;
 - the benefits of involvement with the skills broker and of any training conducted under Train to Gain;
 - the likelihood of future involvement with Train to Gain;

- the impact of the current recession on employers' views of training as a business priority, on training expenditure, and on the importance of financial support for training; and
- the relevance of the recent policy changes under Train to Gain in the context of the recession, including the new flexibilities for SMEs, the offer of a contribution to wage costs, and widening of the Leadership and Management offer.

3.3 The Train to Gain skills brokerage service ended in March 2009. From April, the RDA integrated brokerage service delivered by Business Link assumed responsibility for providing skills advice to employers interested in Train to Gain. This change is part of the government's Business Support Simplification Programme that is streamlining support services for employers. The Business Link service provides impartial advice to employers of all sizes on a wide range of business needs including Skills.

3.4 The second research element discussed in this report is a longitudinal survey, which involved re-contact of employers who first came in contact with the skills brokerage service in late 2007/early 2008 and who were first interviewed a few months later for Sweep 3 of the broker-led evaluation. The findings from these follow-up interviews allows the analysis to adopt a long-term perspective by following employers' views and training practices over time. A specific objective of this strand of the evaluation was to look at the extent to which employer take up of Train to Gain training leads to sustainable benefits to organisational performance in the long-term.

3.5 The third element of the research consisted of a survey of employers who accessed Train to Gain after an initial contact with a college or training provider, who will be referred to as 'provider-led' employers. Contrary to the broker-led employers, all provider-led employers had taken up training under Train to Gain. This is the first time that the main Employer Evaluation has included research carried out among this group of employers. Its key objectives were:

- to explore how the experience of provider-led employers differs from that of those accessing Train to Gain via the skills broker-led route;
- to identify the outcomes and benefits of engaging with Train to Gain training for provider-led employers, and to ascertain whether these differ from those experienced by broker-led employers; and
- to examine if there is evidence that an independent, impartial skills brokerage service would have provided additional benefits.

3.6 Comparing the experience and impact of Train to Gain amongst broker-led and provider-led employers has to be approached with some caution, since the two cohorts differ significantly in that not all of the broker-led employers had taken up training under Train to Gain, while all provider-led employers did so. Therefore, in

the interest of comparing like with like, this report compares where applicable the views and training practices of provider-led employers with a subset of those broker-led employers who also took up training under Train to Gain.

- 3.7 This report also makes reference to qualitative research conducted as part of the Employer Evaluation in May and June 2009. This qualitative research explored the views and experiences of three discrete groups of employers:
- Broker-led employers who had their initial contact with the skills brokerage service between May and October 2008, and were interviewed for Sweep 4 of the main quantitative evaluation. The employers selected for the qualitative research had all indicated at Sweep 4 that they expected a decrease in their training expenditure due to the recession, and this element of the research focused specifically on responses to the recession. 40 face-to-face depth interviews were conducted with these employers.
 - Provider-led employers who accessed Train to Gain training in the previous 6 months, and had had no contact with the skills brokerage service. As with Sweep 1 of the quantitative provider-led evaluation, the aim was to compare provider-led employer experiences with those of employers using the skills brokerage service. 30 depth interviews were conducted by telephone with these employers.
 - Employers not engaged with Train to Gain, to highlight their perceptions of Train to Gain, barriers to engagement and priority support needs that might be met through Train to Gain. 10 discussion groups were conducted with these employers.

Outline methodology

- 3.8 The main broker-led evaluation has been conducted in survey 'sweeps' at regular intervals. Each sweep has been based on a structured telephone survey of employers who were engaged with Train to Gain following an initial contact with a skills broker.
- 3.9 Five new user broker-led employer sweeps have been completed to date, which have involved interviewing employers a few months after their initial contact with the Train to Gain skills brokerage service (see Annex B for report reference details for Sweeps 1 to 4). The first of these new user broker-led employer sweeps was carried out in summer 2007, and gathered evidence from employers who had had initial contact with a skills broker between January and April of that year. The latest sweep (Sweep 5) was carried out in summer 2009 and focused on employers who were initially in contact with the skills brokerage service between November 2008 and March 2009. The findings from Sweep 5 are presented for the first time in this report.

- 3.10 The second research element of the broker-led employer evaluation was a longitudinal survey, which was designed to follow up those employers who had already been a part of the 'new user' sweeps. These interviews were conducted a year after the initial new user broker-led survey in which those employers had been included – this represents a time lag of between 13 and 22 months between the initial engagement with the skills broker and the interview for the longitudinal survey. The third survey of this kind (Longitudinal Survey 3) data for which is reported here for the first time, took place in summer 2009 and involved re-contacting employers originally surveyed at Sweep 3 of the new user broker-led employer evaluation who had originally been in contact with their skills broker between November 2007 and April 2008.
- 3.11 The third research element included those employers who accessed Train to Gain training via a college or training provider. This is the first survey of the main Employer Evaluation that has focused on provider-led employers (Sweep 1). The survey took place in summer 2009 and involved employers who had employees start some training under Train to Gain between November 2008 and March 2009.
- 3.12 Considering each of the three elements of the Employer Evaluation for each survey sweep, Table 1 details the periods when employers were interviewed and the number of interviews achieved during the fieldwork. It also shows for broker-led employers when they were initially in contact with the skills brokerage service, and for provider-led employers when they started training under Train to Gain.

Table 1: Structure of the employer evaluation

Evaluation Element*	Period of initial contact with Train to Gain	Fieldwork period	Number of employers interviewed
New user broker-led Sweep 1	January – April 2007	June – July 2007	3,759
New user broker-led Sweep 2	May – October 2007	January – March 2008	3,976
New user broker-led Sweep 3	November 2007 – April 2008	June – August 2008	3,753
New user broker-led Sweep 4	May – October 2008	January – March 2009	3,750
New user broker-led Sweep 5*	November 2008 – March 2009	June – August 2009	3,750
Longitudinal broker-led Survey 1	January – April 2007	June – August 2008	1,685
Longitudinal broker-led Survey 2	May – October 2007	January – March 2009	1,909
Longitudinal broker-led Survey 3*	November 2007 – April 2008	June – August 2009	1,530
Provider-led employers Sweep 1*	November 2008 – March 2009	June – August 2009	3,750

* New survey data presented for the first time in this report.

3.13 The survey sample for the broker-led employer evaluations was supplied by Train to Gain skills brokerage organisations on a monthly basis and consisted of contact details of those employers who were in contact with a skills broker with regard to Train to Gain in the preceding month. The full contact lists supplied by the skills brokerage organisations provided a complete population of all employers who had had contact with a skills broker during each month. This allowed the survey data to be weighted according to the original total population figures. The survey sample included all employers who had had at least some contact with a Train to Gain skills broker, but excluded employers who accessed Train to Gain via a purely provider-led route.

3.14 Employer contact details for the provider-led survey sample were derived from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), which is managed by the Further Education Data Service. This sample was generated by identifying employers with Train to Gain learner starts recorded on the ILR for the period November 2008 to March 2009. Those employers for whom there was evidence on the ILR of skills broker mediation of the contact were excluded. The survey questionnaire had an additional screener question that excluded any employer who may have had contact with a skills broker in order to ensure that the sample only included employers who accessed Train to Gain purely through a training provider.

3.15 The evaluation was conducted by IFF Research using computer-aided telephone interviewing. Quotas were imposed in order to ensure a proportional spread of interviews by region for Sweep 5 of the new user broker-led survey and for Sweep 1 of the provider-led survey. At the analysis stage regional weights were applied to

the survey data in order to ensure that the results reflect the regional sample populations.

- 3.16 The aim of Longitudinal Survey 3 was to re-contact as many employers as possible who had previously participated in Sweep 3 of the new user broker-led survey. As a result, no quotas were set for the fieldwork. The regional weights applied to the data at the analysis stage refer back to the regional profile of the population of new user broker-led employers who were initially in contact with their skills broker between November 2007 and April 2008.
- 3.17 Further details of the sampling of employers and the weighting of the data can be found in Annex A.
- 3.18 All findings presented in this report are based on weighted data, unless otherwise specified. The exception is where base sizes are shown on figures and tables. Here, the un-weighted sample sizes that the findings are based on are presented, in order to indicate the reliability of the data.

4 Profile of employers

Key findings

- 4.1 As in previous sweeps, the Public Administration, Health and Education sector is heavily over-represented among employers using Train to Gain; a third of broker-led employers (34 per cent) and two fifths of provider-led employers (42 per cent) were from this sector despite it representing only 17 per cent of employers nationally. However, the previous decline in the proportion of broker-led employers from this sector does appear to have levelled off.
- 4.2 The Financial and Business Services sector was under-represented in both groups. While a quarter of broker-led employers (25 per cent) were from this sector, an increase of six percentage points on Sweep 4, less than one in ten (9 per cent) of provider-led employers were from this sector. By comparison, the sector makes up a third (33 per cent) of all employers in England.
- 4.3 The size profile of businesses has changed little since Sweep 4 with 84 per cent of employers in contact with a skills broker having fewer than 50 employees. The trend for the increasing involvement of the smallest employers (1-4 employees) has continued with 23 per cent of employers involved being from this sizeband in Sweep 5, compared to 17 per cent at Sweep 1. The size profile of employers involved through the provider-led route was similar with 80 per cent having fewer than 50 employees.

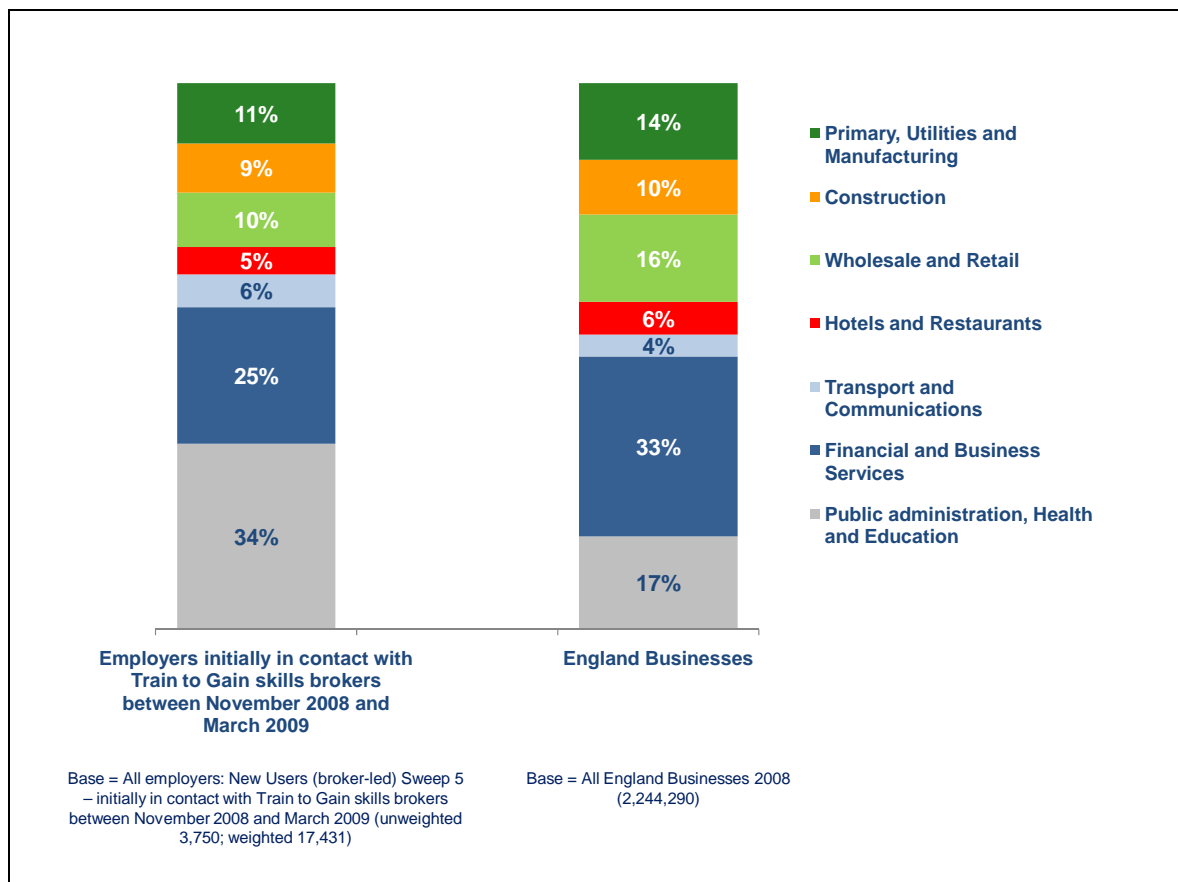
Introduction

- 4.4 This section examines the profile of Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers and, for the first time, those taking up Train to Gain training directly through a provider. It also profiles the broker-led employers participating in the longitudinal study.
- 4.5 As a note, population data broken down by sector does not exist, therefore it was not possible to weight the survey data by industry sector. As a result, the employer profiles reported in this chapter may have been influenced to a certain degree by a response bias, which may have favoured an over-representation of employers in the Public Administration, Health and Education sector. At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that a very high proportion of the relevant population was interviewed in the survey; a fact which should act to minimise response bias and make for robust survey findings.

Employer sector

- 4.6 Figure 1 shows the sector profile of Sweep 5 broker-led employers and the sector profile of the business population in England. It should be noted that this does not match exactly the period in which there was initial contact with the skills brokerage service (November 2008 to March 2009), and therefore it is not possible to make a completely accurate comparison with the population of businesses available to the skills brokerage service during this time. The population profile differs very little from one year to the next however, so we can be confident that these comparisons are valid.
- 4.7 The profile of employers in England was taken from the Inter-Departmental Business Register 2008, for local units in VAT and/or PAYE-based enterprises in England. IDBR statistics only started including PAYE based enterprises (non-VAT registered) in 2008, therefore figures are higher from those reported in 2007 (by about 500,000).

Figure 1: The sector profile of employers in contact with Train to Gain skills brokerage service, compared with the business population in England



- 4.8 The profile by sector differs little from the profile of broker-led employers previously using the service apart from in the Financial and Business Services sector where the proportion of all broker-led employers represented by this sector has almost doubled since the first sweep of the evaluation. Table 2 shows how sector profile has changed over time.
- 4.9 Although the proportion of Financial and Business Services employers has risen over time, the sector is still under-represented overall, as are broker-led employers in both the Wholesale and Retail and Primary, Utilities and Manufacturing sectors.
- 4.10 As previously, broker-led employers from the Public Administration, Health and Education sector are significantly over-represented compared to the overall business population, accounting for a third (34 per cent) of all Train to Gain skills brokerage services users compared with 17 per cent of the overall business population.

Table 2: Change in the sector profile of employers who had initial contact with the Train to Gain skills brokerage services between January 2007 and March 2009

Sweep No. (Period of initial contact with Train to Gain)	New User Research Sweep					Change Sweep 1 to 5
	1 (Jan–Apr 07)	2 (May–Oct 08)	3 (Nov 07–Apr 08)	4 (May–Oct 08)	5 (Nov 08–Mar 09)	
Base: All Employers	3,759	3,976	3,753	3,750	3,750	
Employer Sector	%	%	%	%	%	% points
Public Administration, Health and Education	38	36	33	33	34	-4*
Financial and Business Services	13	15	18	19	25	+12*
Wholesale and Retail	15	12	13	11	10	-5*
Primary, Utilities and Manufacturing	13	13	13	14	11	-2*
Construction	9	11	10	10	9	-
Transport and Communications	7	9	8	5	6	-1
Hotels and Restaurants	5	5	5	7	5	-

* Differences in the Sweep 1 and Sweep 5 figures are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

Size of employer

- 4.11 As in previous sweeps, the majority of employers in contact with the skills brokerage service had fewer than 50 employees at their site (84 per cent). The trend for the increasing number of the smallest employers (with fewer than 5 employees) involved has continued, from 17 per cent in Sweep 1 to 23 per cent in Sweep 5, while relatively fewer employers with between 10 and 249 employees

were involved, again continuing a trend seen in previous Sweeps. Table 3 shows the breakdown of employers by size over time.

Table 3: Change in the size profile of employers using the skills brokerage service, January 2007 to March 2009

	Research Sweep (Initial contact with Train to Gain)					Change sweep 1 to 5
	1 (Jan–Apr 07)	2 (May–Oct 07)	3 (Nov 07–Apr 08)	4 (May–Oct 08)	5 (Nov 08–Mar 09)	
Base: All Employers	3,759	3,976	3,753	3,750	3,750	
	%	%	%	%	%	% points
1 to 4 employees	17	17	20	22	23	+5*
5 to 9 employees	18	19	20	21	21	+3*
10 to 49 employees	46	47	45	43	41	-5*
50 to 249 employees	15	14	13	12	12	-3*
250+ employees	3	3	3	3	3	0

** Differences in the Sweep 1 and Sweep 5 figures are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.*

Human resources and training objectives

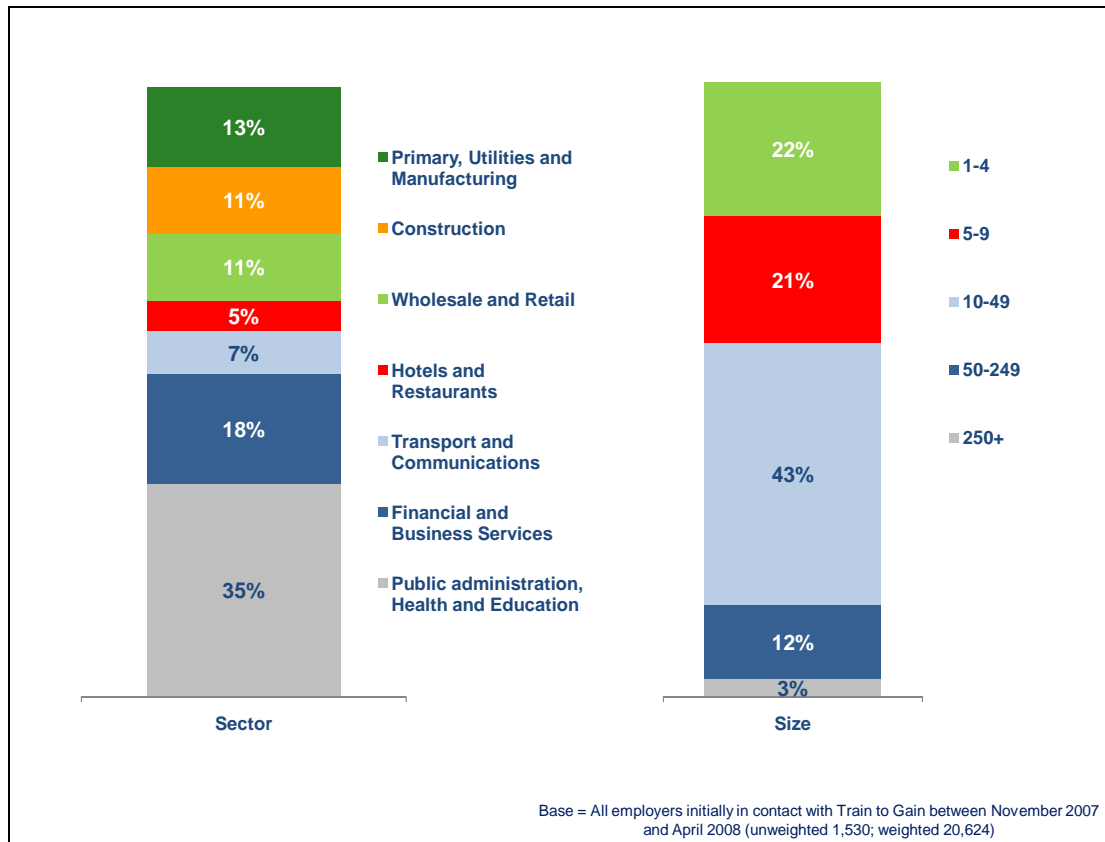
- 4.12 In evaluating the profile of employers using the skills brokerage service, it is useful to look at the extent to which these employers can operate independently and thus the extent to which they would have the power to change their training and development strategy as a result of the guidance and opportunities offered through Train to Gain. This information will also set the context for later sections of this report, for example those focusing on the additional value of Train to Gain and the impact it has on changing employers' attitudes and approaches to training their employees.
- 4.13 Of all broker-led employers, 70 per cent are single site organisations and thus responsible for their own training strategy and resourcing. A further 15 per cent are Head Offices of larger organisations, and would determine their own strategy. Of the 15 per cent who were branches of a larger organisation, 77 per cent had at least some input into their training. Overall just 3 per cent of employers in the survey had their HR training objectives wholly laid out by another part of the organisation, leaving 97 per cent of the employers in contact with the skills brokerage services with at least some responsibility for their HR and training strategy.

- 4.14 Sweep 5 of the evaluation found 50 per cent of broker-led employers to have a training plan, slightly higher than in previous sweeps (47 per cent in Sweep 4).
- 4.15 An employer's engagement with the Investors in People standard represents an advanced level of strategic planning for training and development and emphasises commitment to the area. Just under a fifth (18 per cent) of the employers currently hold the Investors in People standard, with a further 13 per cent working towards it (compared to 22 per cent and 13 per cent at Sweep 4). There were a few (5 per cent) who had been recognised as Investors in People in the past but the standard had lapsed. The remaining 62 per cent have had no involvement in the scheme. As in previous sweeps it is employers from the Public Administration, Health and Education sector who are most involved with the scheme, with 51 per cent of those currently recognised as Investors in People being from this sector.
- 4.16 Taken together, these findings on training planning and budgeting and involvement with the Investors in People standard suggest, as in previous sweeps, that many of the employers accessing skills brokerage service could be considered to have had a reasonably well-developed training culture before they became involved with Train to Gain. While this continues to raise concerns about whether these employers are those most in need of the services provided by Train to Gain, findings on the impact of the service for these employers suggest that, for most employers, the services still bring the employer additional value.

Profile of broker-led employers re-contacted in Longitudinal Survey

- 4.17 Employers originally in contact with the skills brokerage service between November 2007 and April 2008 were followed up for the Longitudinal survey in Summer 2009. Figure 2 shows the size and sector breakdown of these employers.

Figure 2: Profile of employers followed up for the Longitudinal survey

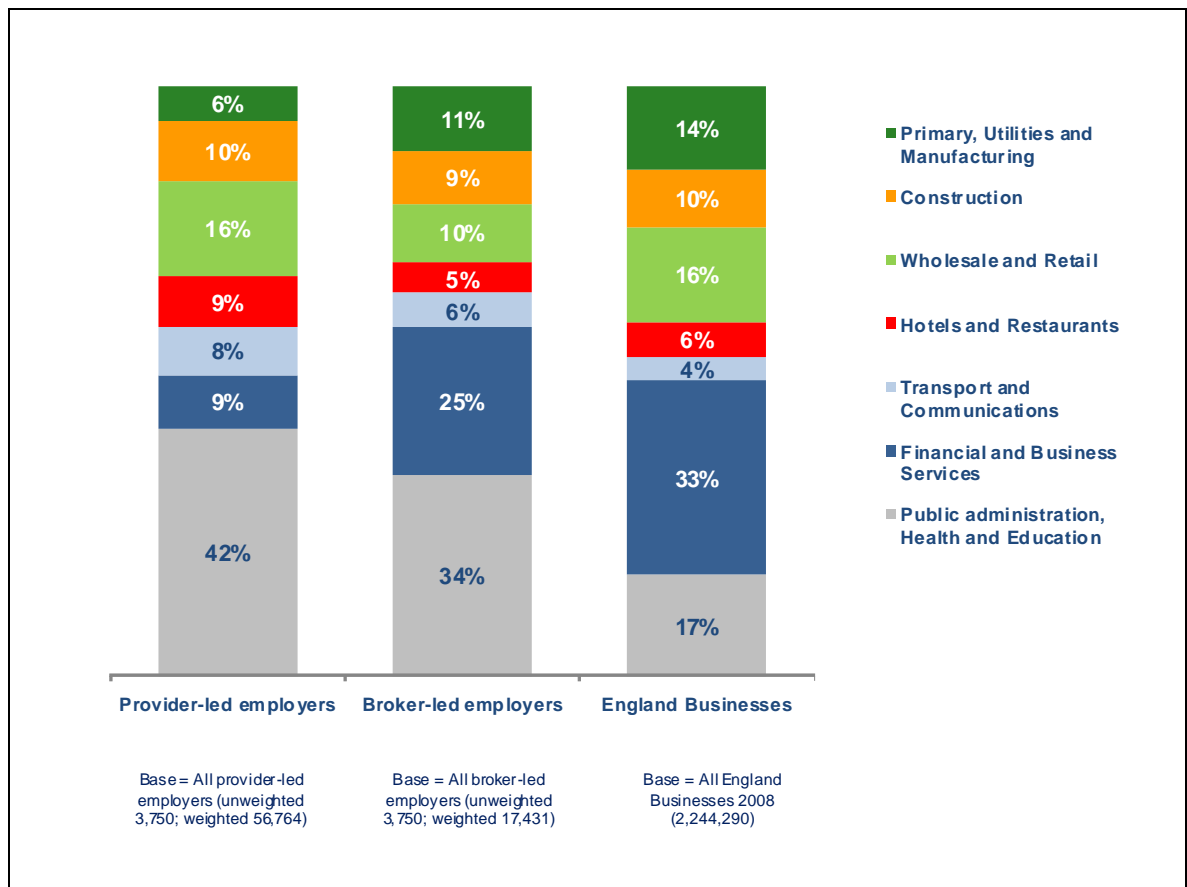


4.18 The profile broadly mirrors that of new user broker-led employers interviewed in Sweep 5 although the proportion of broker-led employers in the Financial and Business Services sector is significantly lower within the Longitudinal survey profile (18 per cent) compared to Sweep 5 of the broker-led survey (25 per cent). This reflects the relatively large increases seen over time in the involvement of these broker-led employers in the service (as shown in Table 2).

Profile of Sweep 1 provider led employers

4.19 The profile of Sweep 1 provider-led employers involved in Train to Gain by sector is quite different to that of those using the skills brokerage service. Public Administration, Health and Education is still the largest sector with 42 per cent of all provider-led employers being from this sector. However the Financial and Business Services sector is much more under-represented with just 9 per cent of provider-employers from this sector compared to 25 per cent of those using the skills brokerage, and 33 per cent of employers overall in England.

Figure 3: Profile of Sweep 1 provider-led vs. Sweep 5 broker-led employers

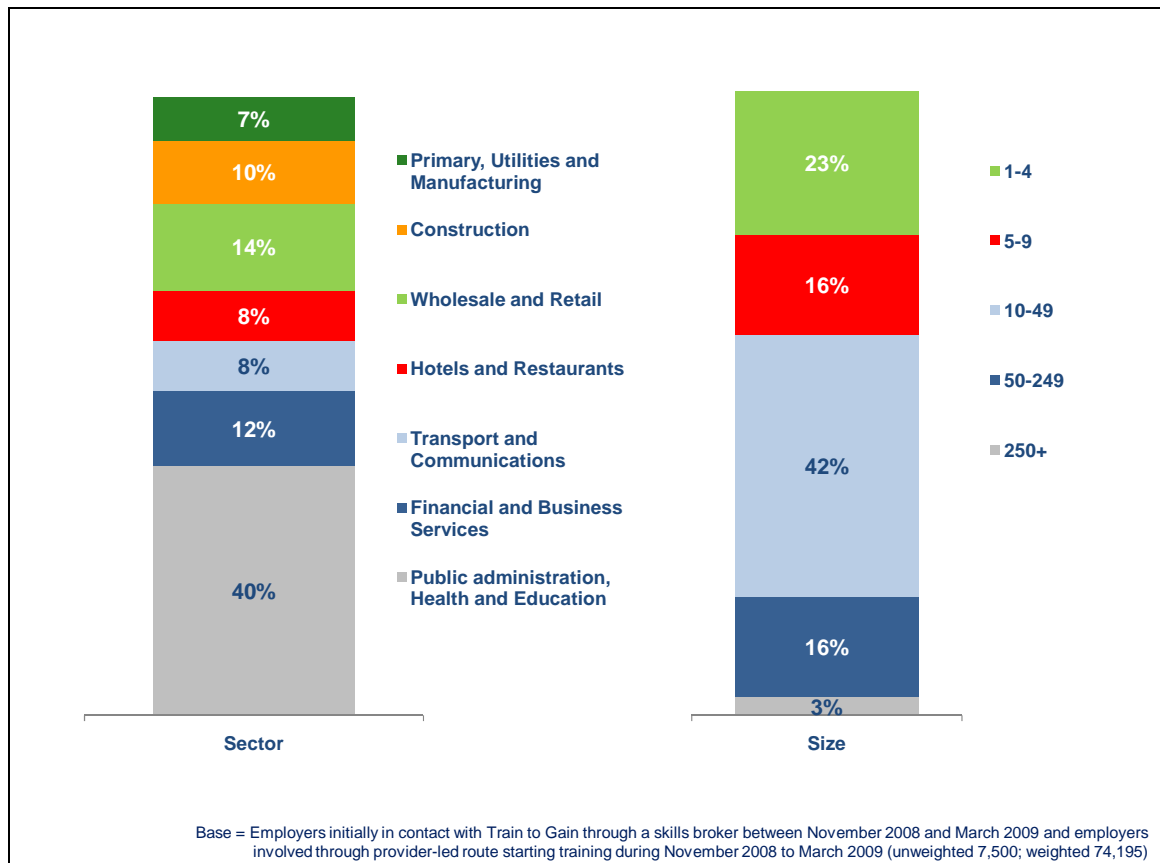


- 4.20 The size profile of the two cohorts was very similar, with 80 per cent of provider-led employers having fewer than 50 employees, and just 3 per cent being from the largest sizeband (250 or more employees).
- 4.21 A lower proportion of the employers involved through the provider-led route were single site organisations (52 per cent compared to 70 per cent).
- 4.22 A similar proportion of provider-led employers involved through the provider-led route have a training plan (56 per cent) while just under a half (47 per cent) have a training budget. Provider-led employers were slightly more likely to have achieved the Investors in People standard, with 26 per cent currently recognised and a further 13 per cent working towards it, with 4 per cent who have lapsed. 50 per cent had no involvement.

Combined Broker and Provider-Led Sample

4.23 Figure 4 shows the combined profile of Sweep 5 broker-led employer and Sweep 1 provider-led employer sample. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is again worth noting the difference between the two groups: those broker-led employers who have been in contact with a skills broker initially between November 2008 and March 2009 have not necessarily undertaken any training, while provider-led employers who are involved through the provider-led route all had employees start Train to Gain training during that same period. Given these differences this profile should only be treated as indicative of the profile of all employers involved through Train to Gain at this time.

Figure 4: Profile of broker and provider-led sample combined



5 Triggers for employer involvement with Train to Gain

Key Findings

- 5.1 Employers involved in the skills brokerage service most commonly became aware of Train to Gain when they were contacted by the skills broker. Referrals through Business Link were also common, but the proportion finding out about Train to Gain through advertisements had fallen since Sweep 4, reversing the previous trend for an increase in employers citing this channel and reflecting a reduction in media spend on the promotion of the service. Employers involved through the provider-led route however were in fact most likely to say they first heard of Train to Gain through advertisements, which was in contrast to the broker-led employers.
- 5.2 As in previous sweeps, access to training opportunities remains the most common motivation for becoming involved in Train to Gain among broker-led employers. Access to financial assistance is becoming more prominent as a motivation as well. Approaching half of Sweep 5 broker-led new user employers (46 per cent) reported that their decision was down to their interest in accessing financial support, compared to 41 per cent in Sweep 4 and 38 per cent in Sweep 3. This is likely to be at least partly due to the effects of the recession. Around half of Sweep 1 provider-led employers, all of whom had trained through Train to Gain, rated the availability of subsidies for Level 2 and Level 3 training as very important to their decision to undertake this training.
- 5.3 Over two fifths (43 per cent) of those broker-led employers eligible for contribution to wage costs were not aware that this forms part of the Train to Gain offer when they took the decision to become involved in Train to Gain. The existence of the additional contribution to wage costs service for SMEs is an area where skills brokers and Train to Gain marketing could place more emphasis to increase awareness, as it is likely to be instrumental in attracting more SMEs to Train to Gain, and in ensuring that they can continue to train and develop to survive the economic downturn.
- 5.4 Almost one in six provider-led employers (16 per cent) said they had not heard of Train to Gain at all, even after having taken up training through the Train to Gain funding stream. Furthermore, of those aware of the service, half (51 per cent) were either not aware or not clear about whether the training undertaken had been arranged through Train to Gain. One in six (18 per cent) of those who initially approached the provider themselves (rather than the provider approaching them) did so with the explicit aim of discussing Train to Gain with them (equivalent to 5 per cent of provider-led employers overall). The majority (80 per cent) however were looking to discuss training needs more generally.

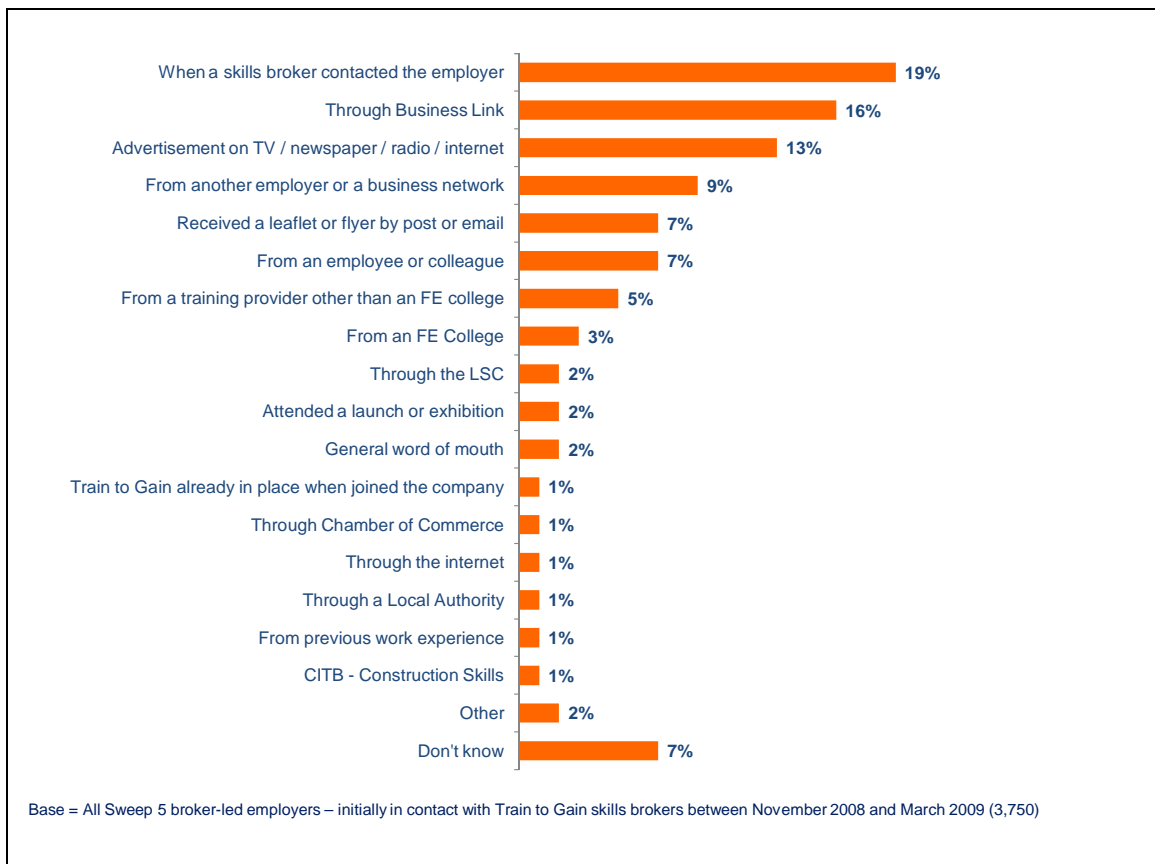
Introduction

- 5.5 The channels by which employers first become aware of Train to Gain and the motivations for accessing the service differ substantially between different employers. This section looks at the different organisations and promotions driving awareness of Train to Gain, along with employers' motivations for using the services. Sweep 5 of the evaluation expanded its scope by looking at provider-led interaction as well as that experienced by employers in contact with a skills broker, and as such differences in awareness and motivation between these two sets of employers will be examined.

Initial exposure to Train to Gain among Sweep 5 broker-led employers

- 5.6 Employers were asked (without prompting) how they had first become aware of Train to Gain. The channel most frequently cited by new user broker-led employers was, as previously, from the skills broker contacting the employer, although the percentage citing this reason was slightly down on previous sweeps (19 per cent, compared to 24 per cent in Sweep 4). It should be noted that all employers surveyed had had some contact with a skills broker at some stage, however it is only for these 19 per cent that this was the first they had heard of Train to Gain. Figure 5 shows the proportion of Sweep 5 broker-led employers mentioning each channel.

Figure 5: Channels through which Sweep 5 broker-led employers first heard of the Train to Gain service



5.7 The second most frequent channel through which Sweep 5 broker-led employers had heard about Train to Gain was through Business Link (16 per cent). The Train to Gain skills brokerage service ended in March 2009. From April, the RDA integrated brokerage service delivered by Business Link assumed responsibility for providing skills advice to employers interested in Train to Gain. This change is part of the government’s Business Support Simplification Programme that is streamlining support services for employers. The Business Link service provides impartial advice to employers of all sizes on a wide range of business needs including Skills.

5.8 The proportion first encountering Train to Gain through advertisements or promotions on the radio or television, online or in the print media has fallen slightly to 13 per cent. This represents a reversal of the trend for increased prominence of this channel in Sweep 4, where 16 per cent of employers cited media promotions as their first source of information about Train to Gain. The proportion giving this response has now fallen back to the levels seen at Sweep 2 (13 per cent) and Sweep 3 (12 per cent). This is despite the media campaign launched in November 2008 to promote the new flexibilities within Train to Gain, which encompassed peak time television and radio advertising. A channel which has become more prominent in Sweep 5 relates to employers first hearing about Train to Gain through another employer or a business

network (9 per cent) has increased since Sweep 4 (5 per cent), suggesting that Train to Gain is gaining word of mouth momentum. This may mean that more employers are already informed about the service through contact with other employers, before they come into contact with media promotions.

Initial contact with the skills brokerage service

- 5.9 On the whole, skills brokers were more likely to have made the initial contact with the employer rather than the employer initiating the contact, with 59 per cent of contacts initiated by the skills broker and just 34 per cent by the employer. The remainder (all under 1 per cent) were put in contact by Business Link, by a training provider, or met at an event; 6 per cent could not remember. The smallest employers (between 1 and 4 employees) were most likely to initiate contact with the skills broker themselves, with 44 per cent doing so, and least likely to be contacted by a skills broker in the first instance, with half reporting that the skills broker contacted them first.

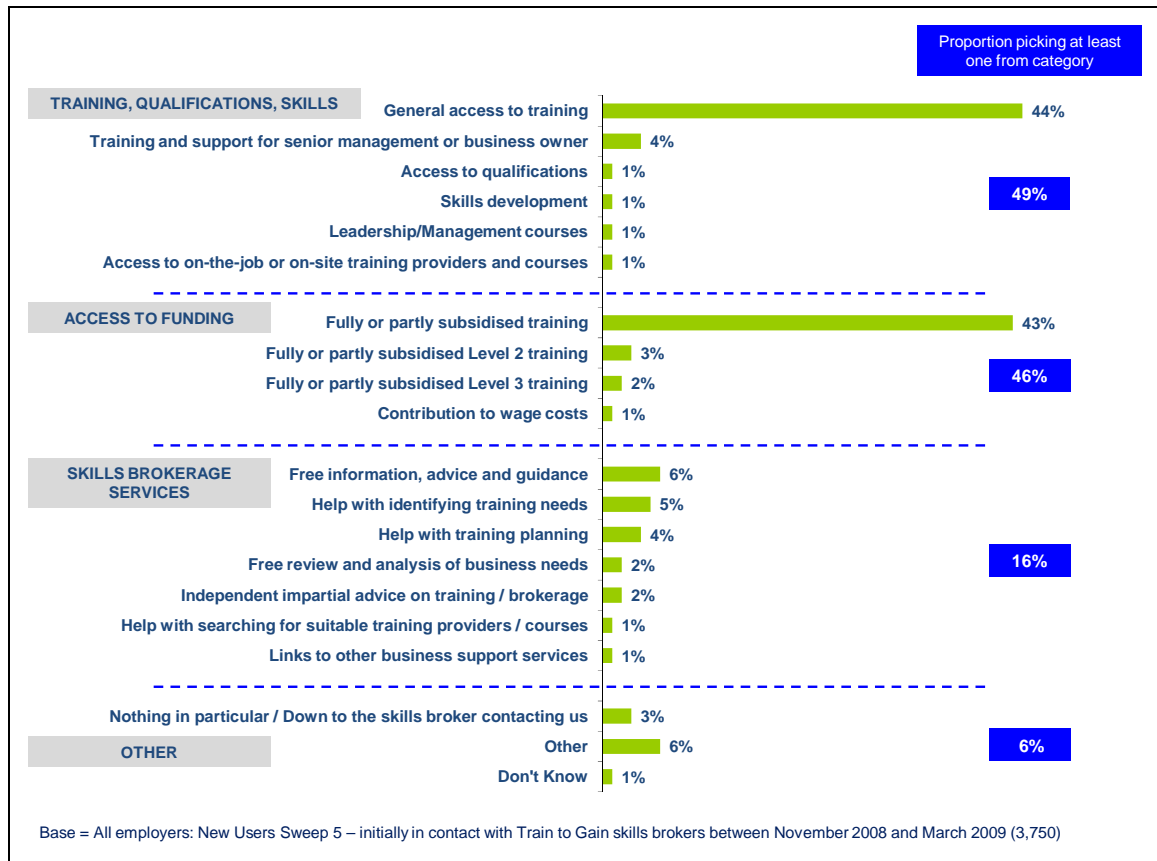
The role of training providers in skills broker-led contacts

- 5.10 Whilst a separate survey has been carried out investigating provider-led employer contacts, it is still useful to look at the roles training providers take in skills broker-led contacts to see whether they provide broker-led employers with any information about Train to Gain and indeed whether they are seen by employers as separate to skills brokers in the process.
- 5.11 Amongst employers who were initially contacted by a skills broker, 24 per cent had previously spoken to a training provider about Train to Gain, either by making an enquiry to a provider or through receiving marketing materials from them. This is the same figure as found in Sweep 4.

Motivators for broker-led employer involvement with Train to Gain

- 5.12 Previous sweeps of the Employer Evaluation have identified a wide variety of factors that contribute to employers being attracted to the Train to Gain service. Details on the component factors in these categories can be seen in Figure 6, which shows the proportion of employers citing each as a motivating factor in their decision to get involved with Train to Gain. No prompting was given when employers were giving their answer, and they could give as many reasons as they wished.

Figure 6: Factors attracting employers to the Train to Gain service – Sweep 5 broker-led employers



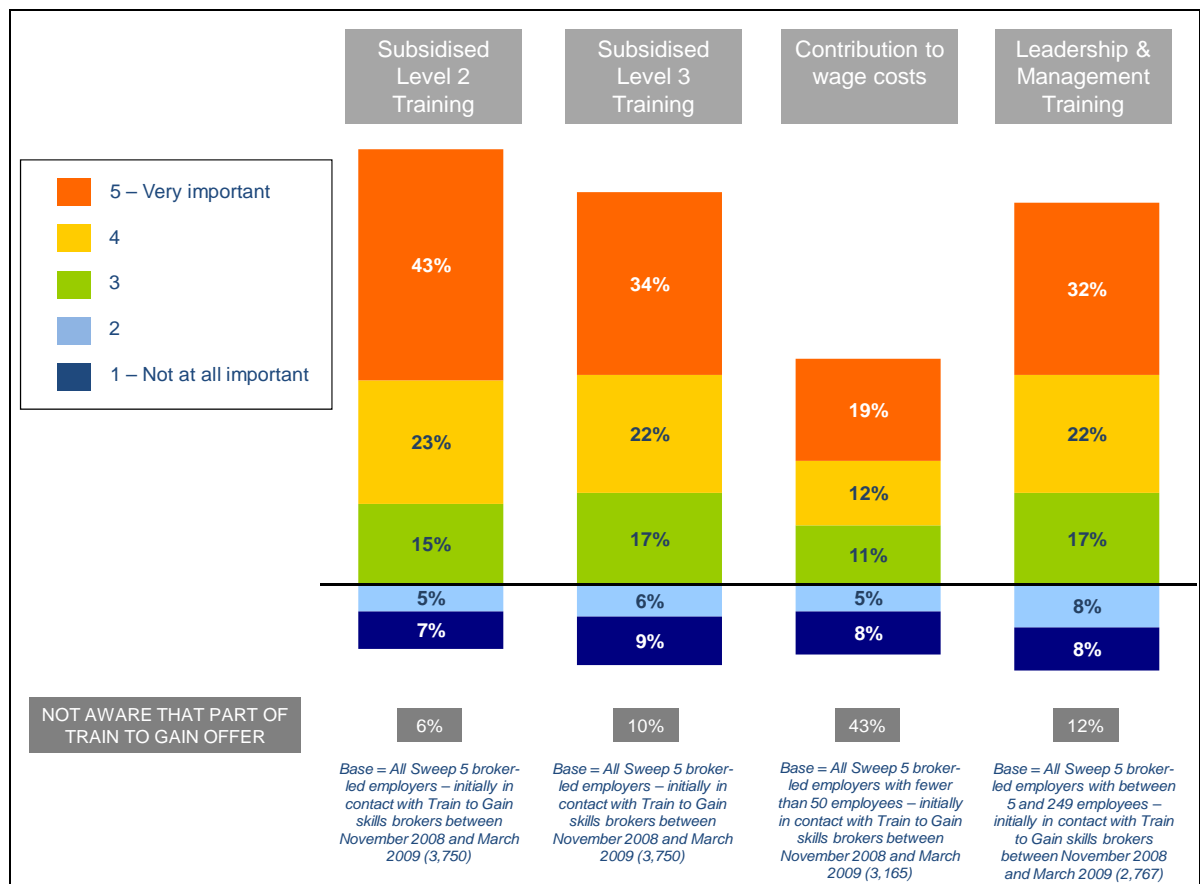
5.13 It should be noted that there is no real evidence from this data to suggest that the new elements of the additional support package for SMEs introduced in late 2008 and early 2009 (see the introductory chapter) were playing a major role in attracting employers to Train to Gain during the period November 2008 to March 2009. Only one in twenty (5 per cent) mentioned spontaneously that they were looking to access training in Leadership and Management or support for management or business owners. However, when prompted, a greater proportion of employers agreed that this was important (see Figure 7). Less than one per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers mentioned the opportunity to access short unit or module based courses (or ‘bite-size chunks’) as a motivating factor.

5.14 The reasons given by new user Sweep 5 broker-led employers for being attracted to the Train to Gain service can be grouped into three broad categories:

- The employer sees Train to Gain as a route for accessing training, qualifications and skills development for their employees (cited by 50 per cent of employers in Sweep 5);
- The employer is interested in accessing financial support for workforce training through Train to Gain (46 per cent.);

- The employer is interested in accessing the skills brokerage service for analysis, information and advice on skills and training issues (16 per cent).
- 5.15 Sweep 5 continues the trend seen over Sweeps 3 and 4 of the evaluation for broker-led employers to be increasingly attracted by the opportunity to access training, rather than skills brokerage services. Half of Sweep 5 broker-led employers (50 per cent) cited factors related to access to training (including training for management, training towards qualifications, or that is specialised or delivered on-site) as motivations for involvement with Train to Gain, compared to 48 per cent in Sweep 4 and 46 per cent in Sweep 3. At the same time, the proportion of new user broker-led employers wanting specifically to access skills brokerage services such as help with identifying training needs has fallen from 21 per cent at Sweeps 3 and 4, to 16 per cent at Sweep 5. This suggests that employers are slightly less likely to feel that they need advisory services from a skills broker initially and are just looking to fill a specific training need, although as will be discussed further in Chapters 7 and 12, employers receiving advice and guidance services through skills brokers do come to consider these important and do rate tools such as the Organisational Needs Analysis as valuable to their awareness of skill needs and solutions.
- 5.16 There has been a significant increase in Sweep 5 in the overall proportion of broker-led employers reporting without prompting that they were attracted to Train to Gain because of their perception that they would be able to access financial support for training. Approaching half of Sweep 5 broker-led new user employers (46 per cent) reported that their decision was down to their interest in accessing financial support, compared to 41 per cent in Sweep 4 and 38 per cent in Sweep 3. This is likely to be at least partly due to the effects of the recession; as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 9, access to fully or partly subsidised Level 2 and Level 3 training is rated as more important by those employers whose training budgets have been negatively affected by the recession.
- 5.17 Whilst there has been this increase in the proportion of broker-led new user employers saying spontaneously that they were drawn to Train to Gain by the funding offer, it is interesting to explore how this translates to the attitude of employers more generally. In order to investigate employer attitudes to financial support more fully, Sweep 5 broker-led employers were asked, on a prompted basis, the importance of contributions to wage costs and subsidies for Level 2 and Level 3 training in their decision to engage with Train to Gain. These employers were also asked to rate the importance of leadership and management training, which was added to the survey for the first time in Sweep 5 to help better understand the relative importance of this key aspect of the new flexibilities. The results are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Importance of subsidised Level 2 and Level 3 training, contribution to wage costs and Leadership and Management training to decision to get involved with Train to Gain



5.18 Figure 7 demonstrates the level of importance employers place on the subsidised training, particularly for Level 2 training where over two fifths (43 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers said that the offer of subsidised Level 2 training was very important to their decision to become involved in Train to Gain. Slightly fewer rated the subsidised Level 3 training as very important, but still over a third did so (34 per cent). These findings are similar to those seen in Sweep 4. The training and funding accessed by those employers for whom subsidised Level 2 and/or Level 3 training was an important reason to get involved with Train to Gain will be discussed in a later section.

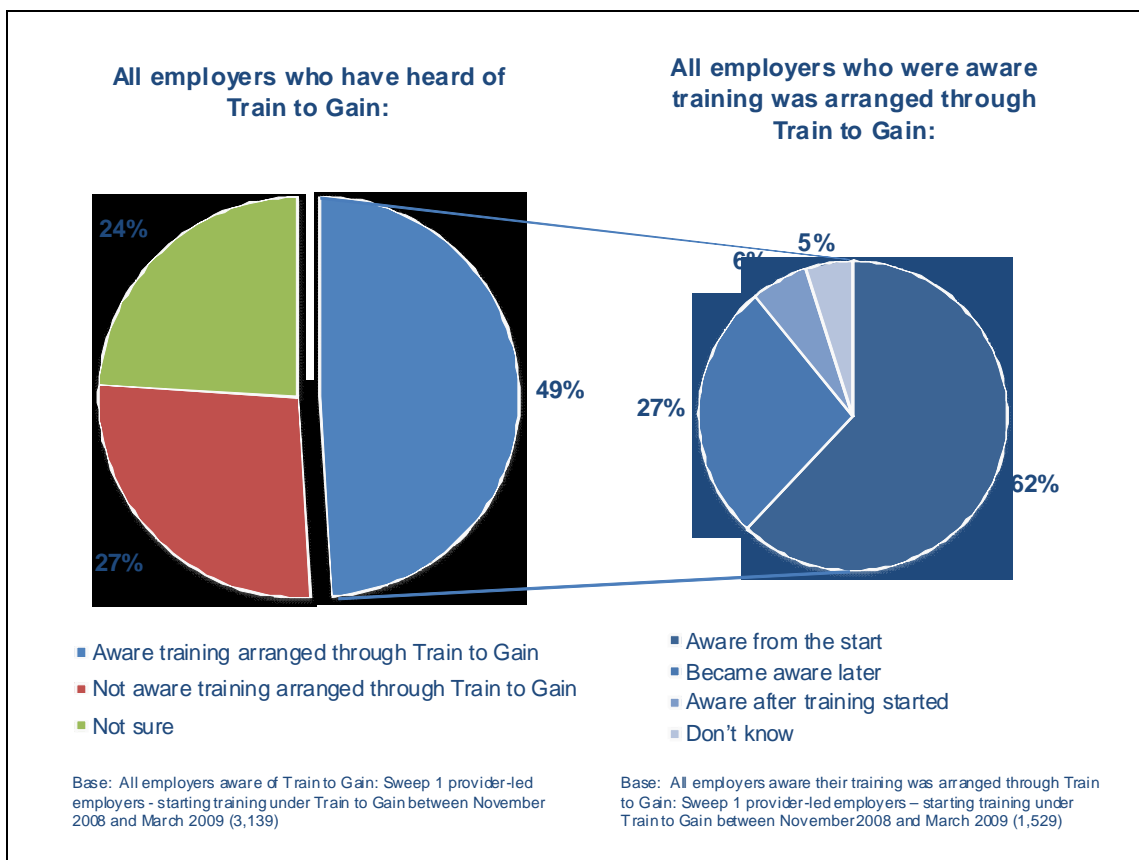
5.19 When prompted, a fifth (19 per cent) of eligible employers (those with fewer than 50 staff) stated that the contribution to wage costs offered by Train to Gain was a very important reason behind their decision to get involved. However over two fifths (43 per cent) of those eligible for contribution to wage costs were not aware that this forms part of the Train to Gain offer when they took the decision to become involved in Train to Gain; this is especially true of the smallest employers with just 1-4 employees. This is higher than in Sweep 4 when 36 per cent were unaware. Of those who were aware of the contribution to wage cost offer, a third (34 per cent) rate this as a very important factor in their decision to get involved with Train to Gain.

- 5.20 This emphasises the perceived value of this contribution to employers, and is supported by the findings of the latest qualitative research work undertaken as part of the Employer Evaluation programme (see Chapter 3 for details of this research). This research emphasised that employers who have not been involved with Train to Gain often have concerns over the financial cost of individuals taking time out to train so modes of training delivery that reduced the amount of down-time were particularly attractive. In keeping with the findings shown here, in the qualitative research, the majority of employers with such concerns were unaware of the existing contribution to wage costs offer in place through Train to Gain, but were positive about the impact this contribution would make to their ability to achieve their training goals.
- 5.21 The existence of the additional contribution to wage costs service for SMEs is an area where skills brokers and Train to Gain marketing could place more emphasis to increase awareness, as it is likely to be instrumental in ensuring that they can continue to train and develop to survive the economic downturn. Indeed, this formed part of the earlier recommendations made as a result of the Sweep 4 findings. Whilst more funding for contributions to wage costs has been made available, it is clear that employers are not necessarily being made aware of or being able to access this additional funding.
- 5.22 The importance of Leadership and Management training was a new question for Sweep 5, included to measure the impact of the extension of funding for this type of training through Train to Gain in late 2008. Figure 7 shows the data on a base of those employers eligible for part subsidies for Leadership and Management training (those with between five and 249 employees). One third of these employers said the provision of Leadership and Management training was very important in their decision to get involved with Train to Gain. Encouragingly, around one in eight (12 per cent) were not aware of this element of the Train to Gain offer at this time.

Comparison of triggers and motivators for broker-led and provider-led employers

- 5.23 The 2009 survey included provider-led employers for the first time, as a separate employer group to be evaluated. As they use a very different channel to access Train to Gain to the broker-led employers, it might be expected that their motivations and triggers may differ. This section looks at where there are differences and why these might be, and also where there are similarities between the two groups of employers.
- 5.24 Provider-led employers are often in contact with their training providers before Train to Gain is broached. It is possible that they will go to a provider for training and take little interest in how this training is achieved. As such, almost one in six (16 per cent) said they had not heard of Train to Gain at all, even after having taken up training through the Train to Gain funding stream.
- 5.25 Of those who had heard of Train to Gain, just half (49 per cent) were aware that their training had been arranged through Train to Gain; 27 per cent said they were not aware and 24 per cent were not sure. Of those that were aware their training was arranged through Train to Gain almost two thirds (62 per cent) had been aware from the start, a further quarter (27 per cent) became aware before the training started and just one in twenty (6 per cent) said they did not become aware their training was being arranged through Train to Gain until after the training had started. Figure 8 shows this graphically.

Figure 8: Proportion aware of Train to Gain involvement with their training, and the stage at which they became aware of this



- 5.26 Only a quarter (24 per cent) of provider-led employers had been in touch with their training provider previous to this occasion regarding training or any other issue. This is comparable to the quarter of Sweep 5 broker-led employers (24 per cent) who had had contact with a training provider with regard to Train to Gain prior to their contact with the skills brokerage service.
- 5.27 Of the quarter of provider-led employers already in contact with their provider, half (51 per cent) had a long history of training their employees with that provider, and just under half (46 per cent) had engaged in some training with the provider. The remaining 4 per cent had been in contact with the provider previously, but had not engaged in any training with them.
- 5.28 In just over one third of cases (36 per cent), the employer had been the pro-active party in making the initial contact regarding the recent training through Train to Gain. The training provider had contacted the employer with an offer of training services in 52 per cent of cases (in another 9 per cent of cases the employer was unsure which party had made the initial approach). This compares to 59 per cent of cases amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers where the initial contact was made by the skills broker.
- 5.29 One in six (18 per cent) of those who initially approached the provider themselves (rather than the provider approaching them) did so with the explicit aim of discussing Train to Gain with them (equivalent to 5 per cent of provider-led employers overall). The majority (80 per cent) however were looking to discuss training needs more generally.
- 5.30 When comparing the motivators for employer involvement with Train to Gain, there are some key differences evident between Sweep 1 provider-led and Sweep 5 broker-led employers. Both sets of employers were asked, on an un-prompted basis, what factors played a part in their initial attraction to Train to Gain. Amongst Sweep 1 provider-led employers a significantly lower proportion than amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers reported that they were attracted to Train to Gain or to training at the provider by the opportunity to access subsidies for training or contributions to wage costs (34 per cent, compared to 46 per cent of broker-led employers). These findings were very similar whether or not the provider-led employer was aware of Train to Gain at the time that they were initially in touch with their provider. It is probable that these employers would have been less aware of the subsidies available through Train to Gain when they first were in contact with the provider, compared to broker-led employers who had more understanding of the service. Amongst the minority of provider-led employers who were the initiator of contact and who had made a specific enquiry about the Train to Gain service (5 per cent), the proportion looking to access subsidies for training was much higher, at 47 per cent.
- 5.31 Sweep 1 provider-led employers were also relatively unlikely to be looking for any type of advice or brokerage services; only one in twelve (8 per cent) said they were looking to get advice and guidance on training needs and solutions from their Train to Gain

provider, compared to 16 per cent of broker-led employers attracted to the skills brokerage service for this reason. Instead, provider-led employers were generally interested in gaining access to training (45 per cent) and in particular access to training towards qualifications (6 per cent, vs. 1 per cent of broker-led employers).

- 5.32 Whilst on the unprompted question, the provider-led employers are less likely than broker-led employers to say that they were attracted to Train to Gain or the provider because of an opportunity to access financial support for training, when asked on a prompted basis how important Level 2 and Level 3 subsidies were to their decision to actually take up training through Train to Gain, they were more likely to deem these very important. 56 per cent and 47 per cent of Sweep 1 provider-led employers said that the availability of subsidies for Level 2 and Level 3 training had been 'very important' to their decision to take up Train to Gain training respectively. This is higher than for the Sweep 5 broker-led cohort, even when just considering the group who went on to take up training through Train to Gain (53 per cent and 41 per cent who deemed Level 2 and Level 3 subsidies as very important respectively). This suggests that although provider-led employers were unlikely to be aware of the Train to Gain offer of financial support at the time of the initial contact with the provider, when it actually comes to deciding whether to take up the training available through Train to Gain following this initial contact, the subsidies play an important role in the decision.
- 5.33 However the differences between the proportions saying contribution to wage costs was very important to them were far less pronounced and not significant, with a fifth (20 per cent) of provider-led employers saying it was very important compared to 19 per cent of broker-led employers who took up training. This could be due to the large number of employers again who were unaware that this service was available, which stood at 44 per cent for the provider-led employers.
- 5.34 The opportunity to access Leadership and Management training was less important for provider-led employers, with just a quarter (25 per cent) rating this as very important compared to 35 per cent of broker-led employers who took up training. Significantly more of the provider-led employers were unaware this service was offered through Train to Gain (23 per cent compared to 15 per cent).

6 Employer satisfaction with advice and guidance service received through Train to Gain

Key findings

- 6.1 A clear majority of employers are satisfied with the advice and guidance service they received as part of their experience of Train to Gain. The skills brokerage service delivered to broker-led employers continues to be successful, with more than three quarters (77 per cent) stating they were 'satisfied' and three-fifths (59 per cent) 'very satisfied' overall with the service they received from the skills broker.
- 6.2 Overall satisfaction levels have remained stable across the previous four Sweeps of the broker-led employer evaluation – apart from a decline in satisfaction from Sweep 1 in early 2007 (80 per cent) to Sweep 2 (78 per cent). Satisfaction with the skills brokerage tends to be significantly higher among those broker-led employers who had taken up training discussed with their skills broker (87 per cent vs. 68 per cent amongst those who had not taken up training in Sweep 5).
- 6.3 Satisfaction levels have held up or increased over the long term for three-fifths (58 per cent) of the broker-led employers who were re-contacted for the Longitudinal Survey 3. The factors driving up employers' satisfaction levels over the long term include having a regular, ongoing contact with the skills broker, receiving relevant advice and help with finding training solutions, and accessing financial support within Train to Gain.
- 6.4 Reflecting the high levels of overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service, four in five (80 per cent) reported that they would be likely to recommend Train to Gain, and half (48 per cent) of employers would be very likely to do so. This mirrors Sweep 4 of the broker-led employer evaluation when 80 per cent were also likely to recommend the service.
- 6.5 Considering employers' expectations of the skills brokerage service, the most important service elements for Sweep 5 broker-led employers continue to be the skills brokers' ability to identify potential sources of funding to support training, their training expertise generally, and their knowledge of training solutions under Train to Gain.
- 6.6 In line with the findings of Sweep 4, employers were less satisfied (relatively speaking) with a number of specific areas of the skills brokerage service, including the ability of the skills broker to signpost an employer to a range of providers, their ability to translate the employer's needs into an action plan, and the speed with which any agreed or required follow-up action is undertaken.
- 6.7 Overall, one broker-led employer in seven (15 per cent) was dissatisfied with the skills brokerage service, which is a significant increase compared with Sweep 2, 3 and 4 (13 per cent) and Sweep 1 (11 per cent), although still a small minority of all employers. Dissatisfied employers continue to complain about a lack of contact with their skills

broker, however, at Sweep 5 they were more likely to be disappointed about the perceived relevance of the advice and about issues related to funding compared with Sweep 4.

- 6.8 Employers within the two specific cohorts reported a number of differences in their experience of the advice and guidance they received. Provider-led employers were more likely to be satisfied with aspects of the customer focus and responsiveness of providers, while broker-led employers rated skills brokers higher on their knowledge and expertise within Train to Gain.
- 6.9 Overall satisfaction is equally high among provider-led employers, with one in nine (87 per cent) being 'satisfied' and three quarters (73 per cent) 'very satisfied', compared with those broker-led employers who took up training as a result of the skills brokerage intervention where 87 per cent were 'satisfied' and 73 per cent 'very satisfied'. This indicates that employers receive good quality advice and guidance whichever route they take to accessing Train to Gain.
- 6.10 Multivariate key driver analysis conducted on the Sweep 5 -broker-led employer group suggests that the ability of the skills broker to source relevant funding for employer training has become a more significant determinant of overall satisfaction compared to previous Sweeps. Conducting the same type of analysis for the provider-led employer survey shows a different pattern in that adviser knowledge (with regard to the training landscape in general and specific qualification and accreditation frameworks) have more of an impact on overall satisfaction amongst provider-led employers.

Introduction

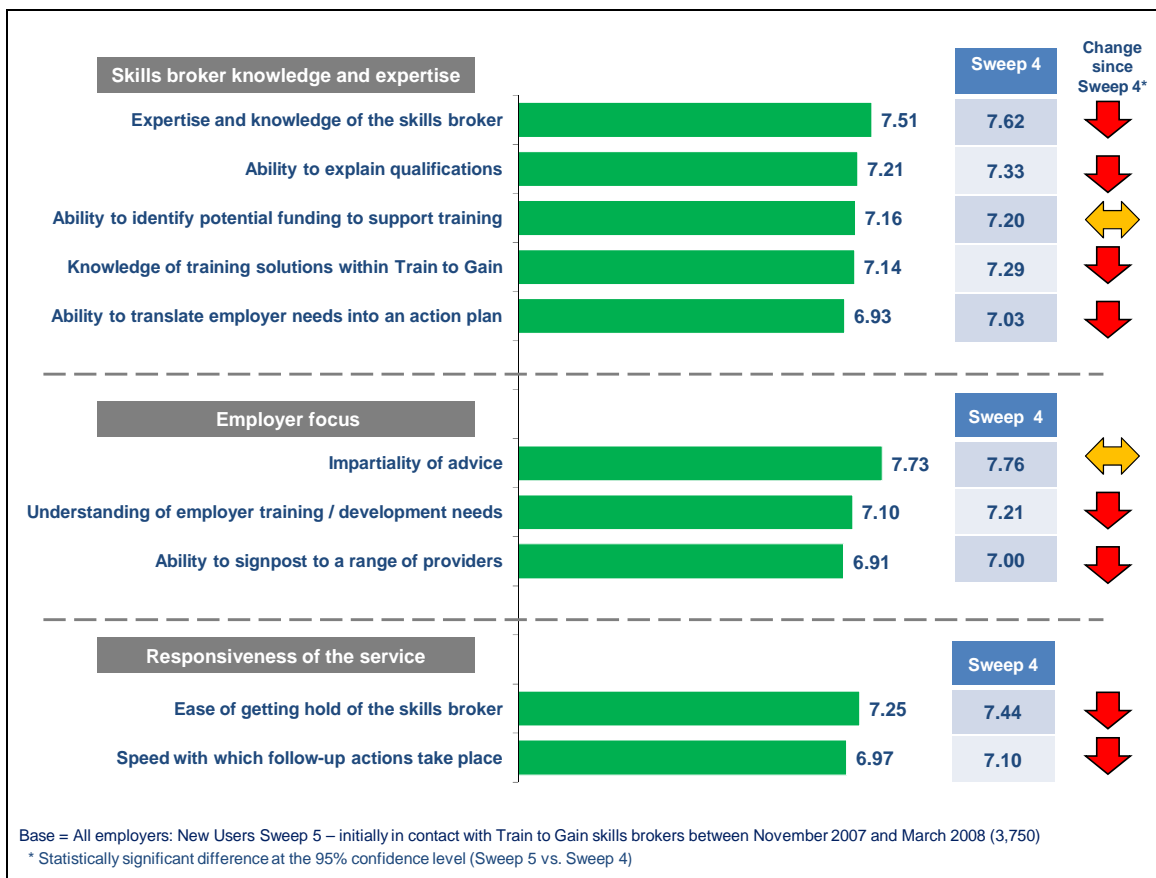
- 6.11 This chapter explores employer perceptions of the advice and guidance service they received as part of their overall experience of getting involved with Train to Gain. In particular, the chapter will discuss how employers rate the various elements of the advice and guidance service in terms of importance, as well as their satisfaction with the service received.
- 6.12 The ratings for importance or satisfaction given by broker-led employers interviewed at Sweep 5 and those recontacted for the third longitudinal survey can be used to assess the skills brokerage service. The chapter also compares their ratings from across the five sweeps of the evaluation to show any shifts over time. It is important to reiterate that not all broker-led employers who accessed Train to Gain via a skills broker went on to take up the training discussed with their skills broker. Even though all were involved with the skills brokerage service and could therefore give feedback on their satisfaction with the advice and guidance service they received from the skills broker, it is likely that their satisfaction ratings of the advice and guidance service are influenced by the extent to which employers have taken up training under Train to Gain.
- 6.13 The findings from the provider-led employer survey and relevant comparisons with the experiences of broker-led employers are presented thereafter. Those employers who accessed Train to Gain via a college or training provider were also asked to rate the

importance and satisfaction with various elements of the advice and guidance service they received from their provider. Since all of the provider-led employers in the survey sample took up training they had discussed with their provider the chapter compares their satisfaction ratings to a subset of broker-led employers who also took up training under Train to Gain.

Satisfaction with key aspects of the skills brokerage service

6.14 New user broker-led employers were also asked to give satisfaction ratings on the same measures for which importance ratings were given, on a scale of 1 to 10, where a score of 1 indicated that the employer was highly dissatisfied and 10 that they were highly satisfied. Mean satisfaction scores are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Mean satisfaction scores for key elements of the skills brokerage service



6.15 Satisfaction with these elements of the service has remained high across the sweeps of the evaluation, with mean scores all above the 6 out of 10 threshold taken to indicate satisfaction in this evaluation. The highest levels of satisfaction in Sweep 5 (just as in Sweep 4) are seen in relation to:

- the impartiality of advice offered by the skills broker (mean score 7.73);

- the expertise and knowledge of the skills broker regarding the local provision market (7.51); and
- the general accessibility of the skills brokerage service, in terms of the ease with which employers are able to get in touch with their skills broker (7.25).

6.16 However, specific areas where the Sweep 5 employers rate skills brokers as having performed less well in relative terms include:

- their ability to signpost to a range of providers (6.91);
- their ability to translate the employer's needs into an action plan (6.93); and
- the speed with which any agreed or required follow-up action is undertaken (6.97);

6.17 Again, this mirrors the findings seen in Sweep 4, albeit at a lower level.

6.18 As a measure of the responsiveness of the skills brokerage service, employers were asked whether the process of accessing advice and training through Train to Gain had taken longer, been quicker, or whether it took about the same amount of time as they had anticipated. Just over half (53 per cent) said it had taken about as long as they expected. Of the remainder, slightly more employers (23 per cent) said the process had taken longer than they had expected than the proportion who said that it had taken less time than they expected (18 per cent). This is slightly more employers than in previous sweeps saying that it took longer than expected, with Sweeps 2, 3 and 4 having 19 per cent of employers with this opinion. However the percentage saying it had been quicker than expected has remained static at 18 per cent.

6.19 The mean satisfaction ratings for each element given by new user broker-led employers across the entire evaluation are shown in Table 4. Employer satisfaction with all elements was significantly higher among the Sweep 1 cohort, who had their first contact with the skills brokerage service early on in the service cycle, in early 2007¹. Satisfaction in all areas declined between Sweep 1 and Sweep 3. There appeared to be some evidence of a relative upturn among the Sweep 4 new user broker-led cohort, which may have been linked to the service improvements implemented in 2008.

6.20 However, satisfaction ratings at Sweep 5 are all lower than during Sweep 4, most significantly so. Moreover, most of the satisfaction ratings given by Sweep 5 employers have fallen below levels seen at Sweep 3 and they are therefore the lowest seen to date. This relative decline in satisfaction ratings may be the result of a variety of reasons. With Train to Gain being in operation now for a longer time, it may be that employers have become more demanding in terms of their expectations of the service, particularly in times of recession. There may be operational or structural factors at work, too, with skills brokers under increased pressure to meet their targets, potentially impacted by the recent change of the skills brokerage service to the regional network of Business Link organisations in April 2009.

6.21 The main exception is employers' satisfaction with the skills brokers ability to identify funding to support their training, which has dropped only slightly compared with Sweep 4 but remains at the same level as at Sweep 2 and is higher than the level seen at Sweep 3. This is an important finding since the ability to identify potential funding sources has been rated as the most important service element by broker-led employers. In the context of the current recession, it is significant that the ability of skills brokers to identify funding for training is being rated so high in terms of employers' satisfaction.

Table 4: Mean satisfaction scores for key elements of the skills brokerage service – time series comparison

	New User Sweep				
	1 (Jan– Apr 07)	2 (May– Oct 07)	3 (Nov 07– Apr 08)	4 (May– Oct 08)	5 (Nov 08– Mar 09)
Base: All employers	3,759	3,976	3,753	3,750	3,750
Skills broker's knowledge and expertise					
Ability to identify potential funding to support training	7.44+	7.16	7.08*	7.2	7.16
Expertise and knowledge of the skills broker	7.89+	7.62	7.55*	7.62	7.51*
Knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain	7.50+	7.29	7.16*	7.29	7.14*
Ability to translate employer needs into an action plan	7.28+	7	6.91*	7.03	6.93*
Ability to explain qualifications and accreditation	7.59+	7.26	7.22*	7.33	7.21*
Employer focus					
Understanding of employer training and development needs	7.30+	7.17	7.14	7.21	7.10*
Impartiality of advice	8.01+	7.74	7.69*	7.76	7.73
Ability to signpost to a range of providers	7.19+	7.02	6.85*	7	6.91*
Responsiveness of the service					
Speed with which follow-up actions take place	7.31+	7.09	6.99*	7.1	6.97*
Ease of getting hold of the skills broker	7.66+	7.37	7.30*	7.44	7.25*

Notes:

+ Score is significantly higher than the overall mean score (across the five Sweeps) – statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

* Score is significantly lower than the overall mean score – statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

Overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service

- 6.22 After giving their importance and satisfaction ratings for the individual measures of service quality, new user broker-led employers were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the advice and guidance service received from the skills brokerage service. Ratings were again provided on a scale of 1 to 10, with a score of 1 to 4 taken to indicate dissatisfaction, and a score of 6 to 10 to represent satisfaction.
- 6.23 Overall, more than three quarters (77 per cent) of the new users interviewed during Sweep 5 were satisfied with the skills brokerage service as a whole, a few months after their initial contact with the service. Three-fifths of employers were very satisfied (59 per cent), giving a score of at least 8 out of 10.
- 6.24 As Table 5 illustrates, the proportion of employers satisfied with the skills brokerage service overall decreased slightly from Sweep 1 to Sweep 2, but has remained relatively constant since then. However, there has been an increase in the proportion of employers whose ratings indicated they were not satisfied, giving scores between 1 and 4. This remained at 13 per cent between Sweeps 2 and 4 but has now increased to 15 per cent of new user broker-led employers.
- 6.25 There was a greater proportion (at Sweep 5 compared with Sweep 4) of dissatisfied employers citing that their expectations about the funding of training were not met and that they were disappointed about the perceived relevance of the advice they received. The reasons for employers' dissatisfaction are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Table 5: Overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service – time series analysis

	New User Sweep				
	1 (Jan– Apr 07)	2 (May–Oct 07)	3 (Nov 07– Apr 08)	4 (May–Oct 08)	5 (Nov 07– Mar 08)
Base: All employers	3,759	3,976	3,753	3,750	3,750
'Satisfied' – Proportion of employers giving overall satisfaction score of between 6 and 10	80%	78%	77%	78%	77%
'Very satisfied' – Proportion of employers giving overall satisfaction score of between 8 and 10	63%	61%	60%	61%	59%
'Dissatisfied' – Proportion of employers giving overall satisfaction score of between 1 and 4	11%	13%	13%	13%	15%

- 6.26 There are a number of factors impacting on how employers rate their overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service. It is clear that those employers who had taken up the training opportunities discussed with their skills broker are significantly more likely to be satisfied with the skills brokerage service (87 per cent) than those who did not take up training (68 per cent). Similarly, those employers who only had a

formal ONA (69 per cent) and those who had a less formal discussion with their skills broker (64 per cent) without yet taking up any training were less likely to be satisfied with the skills brokerage service. So, the more involved employers are with Train to Gain the more likely they are to give a more rounded assessment and higher satisfaction ratings. This observation is consistent with the evidence across all previous sweeps which found that overall satisfaction was associated with the employer's 'depth' of engagement.

Reasons for dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service

6.27 As discussed earlier, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of broker-led employers who were dissatisfied with the skills brokerage service – giving a score of 4 or less out of 10 – from 13 per cent at Sweep 4 to 15 per cent at Sweep 5. These employers mentioned a variety of factors as reasons for their dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service, including:

- There is a recurring theme of dissatisfaction with aspects of the ongoing **communication** between skills broker and employers. The most common issue raised by dissatisfied broker-led employers was a lack of contact (43 per cent), which is related to a lack of follow-up (7 per cent) by their skills broker. Considering both issues together shows that half (50 per cent) of all dissatisfied employers complained along these lines, which is comparable to the findings of Sweep 4 when 49 per cent were dissatisfied because of a lack of contact or follow-up;
- Another area where employers voiced their dissatisfaction relates to the **perceived relevance of the advice** given by skills brokers. One in six (18 per cent) of dissatisfied employers felt that the advice was irrelevant or not what they wanted, and seven per cent thought that the training was irrelevant. Issues raised by dissatisfied employers include experiences of skills brokers suggesting training courses or qualifications that were not required or not applicable or instances where employers had very specific training needs that could not be met. Taken together, there was a quarter of dissatisfied employers (25 per cent) taking issue with the skills brokerage service or the training delivered because they thought it was not relevant to their business. This is an increase compared with the proportion of employers who were dissatisfied because they thought the advice or the training was irrelevant at Sweep 4 (20 per cent);
- Finally, a third theme relates to issues around **funding**, where 8 per cent of dissatisfied employers complained about a lack of funding or about training being too expensive, 5 per cent felt misled or misinformed about the funding advice received, 3 per cent found that funding was not explained properly, and a further 3 per cent complained that they did not receive the promised funding. Considering all these issues renders one in six (19 per cent) of dissatisfied employers reporting their disappointment in relation to a variety of funding aspects, which compares to one in ten (9 per cent) at Sweep 4.

6.28 Table 6 shows these and other reasons given for dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service by Sweep 5 new users.

Table 6: Reasons for dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service

Reason for dissatisfaction	Proportion of employers (Sweep 5)
Base: All employers dissatisfied with the skills brokerage service: New User Sweep 5	540
	%
Lack of contact with the skills broker since the first contact	43
The advice was irrelevant or not what the employer wanted	18
The skills broker lacked knowledge or didn't explain things	10
No funding was available or the training was too expensive	8
Complete lack of follow-up from the skills broker	7
The training was irrelevant or not what the employer wanted	7
The skills broker lacked knowledge or understanding of the business or industry	5
Employer felt that they did not need the skills brokerage service – 'could do the job themselves'	5
Process of accessing the service has taken too long / took too long	5
Felt misled or misinformed by the skills broker, especially in relation to funding	5
Advice was not impartial	4
Process of accessing the service was too complex, bureaucratic or involved too much paperwork	3
Funding was not explained properly	3
Problems arising from having multiple skills broker contacts	3
Did not receive the promised funding	3
Employer felt the skills broker was 'all talk and no action'	2
Lack of professionalism on the part of the skills broker	2
Skills broker was not able to source local training provision for the employer	*
Other	6
Don't know	*

Key drivers of overall dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service

- 6.29 In order to assess the key factors affecting employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service, multivariate analysis – i.e. a statistical data analysis technique involving several variables deployed to detect causal relationships between variables – was conducted to look at the relative impact of the specific aspects of the skills brokerage discussed above.
- 6.30 In this analysis, the dependent variable was the employer's overall satisfaction and the explanatory variables were the employer's satisfaction with the 10 aspects of the skills brokerage service. For the purposes of this analysis, scores were converted into binary variables – satisfied (6–10) or not satisfied (1–5) – and weighted by their importance to the employer. This analysis therefore took account of the relative importance attached by employers to each of the individual service aspects.

6.31 The analysis indicates that the probability of overall satisfaction with the Train to Gain skills brokerage service is greater when Sweep 5 broker-led employers indicate satisfaction with particular aspects of the service. The factors that are most likely to determine overall satisfaction with the service are, in descending order of significance:

- the skills broker's ability to identify potential funding to support employer training activity;
- the speed with which the skills broker is seen to carry out agreed follow-up actions;
- the ease with which the employer is able to get in touch with the skills broker when they want to have a discussion; and
- the capability of the skills broker in terms of translating company needs into an action plan.

6.32 Other elements also have an impact on overall satisfaction, but to a lesser degree. Where employers were satisfied with these factors (again presented in order of decreasing significance below), overall satisfaction was raised well above the base level:

- the skills broker's understanding of the employer's training and development needs;
- the skills broker's ability to signpost a range of provider options to the employer;
- the expertise and knowledge of the skills broker; and
- the skills broker's knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain and training providers within the local area.

6.33 Although the ability of the skills broker to source relevant funding for employer training has been a significant determinant of overall satisfaction across previous sweeps of the evaluation, it is now having a more substantial impact. This reflects the issues raised about employer need for financial support, as noted throughout this chapter. In particular this fits with the greater proportion of employers who are dissatisfied overall saying that this was because of a lack of funding available or due to the skills broker misinforming them about financial support (see also Chapter 11, for discussion of this as a reason for dissatisfaction with training provision). This is also in line with the findings in Chapter 5 which highlighted that there has been an increase in Sweep 5 in the proportion of broker-led employers being attracted to the Train to Gain service because of the perception that they will be able to access financial support.

6.34 Along with the ability of the skills broker to identify funding for employer training, the ease with which the employer can get in contact with the skills broker is also showing as a greater determinant of overall satisfaction in Sweep 5. There has been a corresponding decline in the influence of the skills brokers understanding of the employers training and development needs on overall satisfaction for Sweep 5,

perhaps indicating that employer satisfaction is now less driven by the skills brokers' expertise and more by their responsiveness and efficiency in arranging training plans and getting staff enrolled quickly on subsidised training.

6.35 The impartiality of the skills broker's advice and their capability in explaining various types of qualification and accreditation were not significant determinants of overall satisfaction in Sweep 5, fitting with the pattern across the previous survey waves (the exception being the significant impact of impartiality of advice in Sweep 3).

Recommending Train to Gain to other employers

6.36 Reflecting the high levels of satisfaction with the skills brokerage service, four Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers in five (80 per cent) reported that they would be likely to recommend the Train to Gain service to a business colleague outside their organisation, and half (48 per cent) were very likely to do so. There has been no significant variation in the rates of advocacy across the evaluation – in Sweep 4 the same proportion of employers said they would recommend the service (80 per cent).

6.37 Unsurprisingly, employers who gave a high satisfaction rating (at least 8 out of 10) for the skills broker were more likely to recommend the service (92 per cent), and those who were dissatisfied with the service were much less likely to advocate Train to Gain (37 per cent). These figures are very similar to Sweep 4 where 92 per cent of highly satisfied employers stated they would recommend the service compared to 34 per cent of dissatisfied employers..

Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service in the longer term

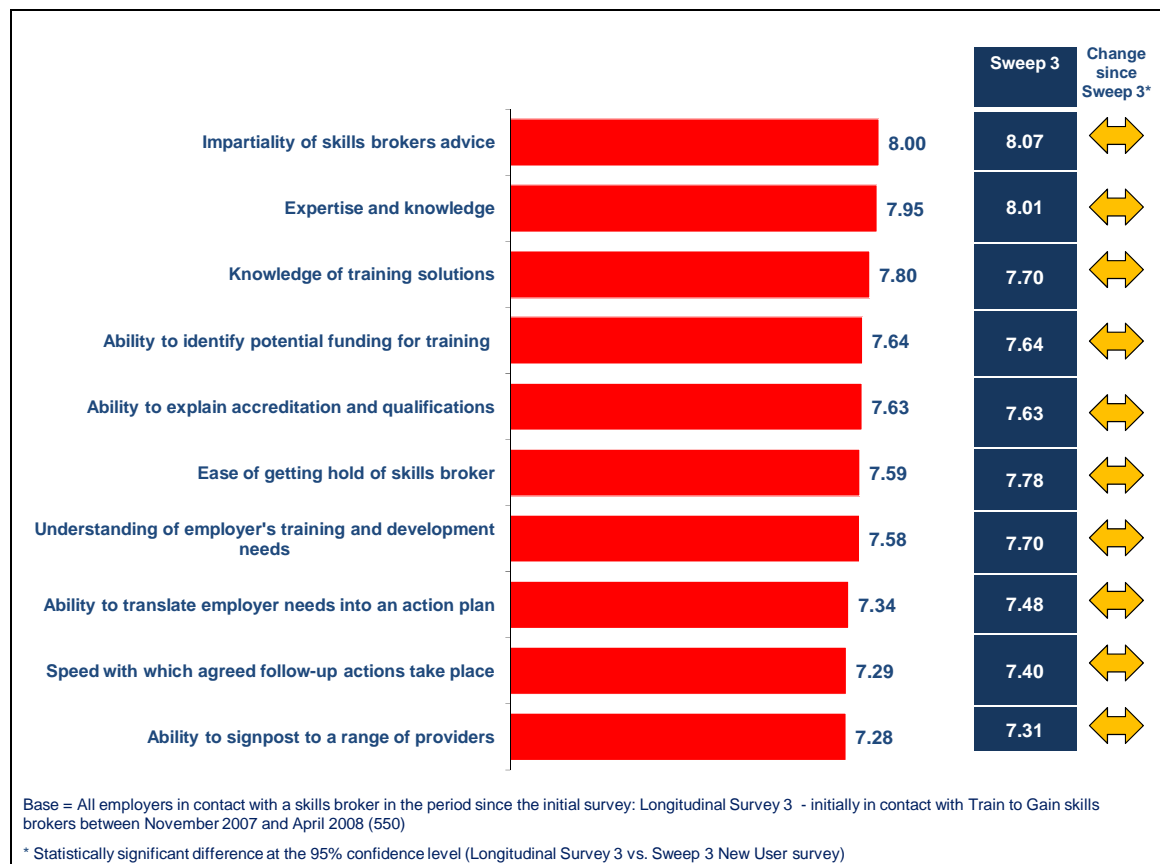
6.38 This section reports on the findings from the third longitudinal survey of broker-led employers. Those employers who had been in touch with their skills broker in the year before they were recontacted for the longitudinal survey were again asked to rate their satisfaction with various elements of the service. The mean satisfaction scores given in the latest Longitudinal Survey 3 (13 to 22 months after the initial contact with the skills broker) are shown in Figure 12, alongside the mean scores these employers gave at Sweep 3, a few months after the original contact with the skills broker (between November 2007 and April 2008).

6.39 As Figure 10 shows, the mean satisfaction scores in the Longitudinal Survey 3 for all service elements range from 7.28 to 8.00, indicating that, when they were re-contacted, employers were generally satisfied with all aspects of the service measured. Employers were most satisfied with:

- the impartiality of information and advice provided by the skills broker;
- the general expertise and knowledge of the skills broker in providing advice and guidance services ; and
- the skills broker's knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain, and of training providers in the employer's local area.

6.40 These satisfaction scores are broadly in line with the responses employers gave at the Longitudinal Surveys 1 and 2, where employers also gave their highest satisfaction ratings for the same three service elements. Satisfaction levels among the recontacted employers for Longitudinal Survey 3 remain high and at the same level compared to when they were first surveyed for Sweep 3 of the broker-led evaluation. This is an improvement compared to the findings of the first Longitudinal Survey 1 which saw employers less satisfied with all elements at their follow-up interview than at Sweep 1 and to a lesser extent compared to Longitudinal Survey 2 where employers were less satisfied with a couple of elements than at Sweep 2.

Figure 10: Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service – Longitudinal Survey 3



6.41 The patterns in the overall satisfaction scores are explored in Table 7 below, which shows how employers rated their satisfaction after being in contact with their skills broker in the previous year. It shows the proportion of those employers who awarded scores of at least 6 and at least 8 out of 10, and also the proportion taken to be dissatisfied – that is, those who gave a score of between 1 and 4. As with employers' satisfaction with specific service elements, there were no significant changes in the way employers rated their overall satisfaction in the third Longitudinal survey compared with Sweep 3 of the new user survey.

Table 7: Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service – time series comparison

	New User Sweep 1	Long. Survey 1	New User Sweep 2	Long. Survey 2	New User Sweep 3	Long. Survey 3
Base: All employers having contact with skills broker in past year	740	740	752	752	550	550
'Satisfied' – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 6 and 10	85%	83%	84%	85%	82%	83%
'Very satisfied' – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 8 and 10	69%	61%*	68%	69%	66%	68%
'Dissatisfied' – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 1 and 4	6%	10%*	8%	9%	10%	9%
Mean overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service	7.98	7.50*	7.91	7.82	7.79	7.69

*Significant difference between new user survey and longitudinal survey at the 95 per cent confidence level

- 6.42 These patterns are comparable to the second longitudinal survey, where there was no significant difference between overall employer satisfaction between the initial sweep of interviewing (a few months after contact was initiated) and the recontact survey. Exploring differences over time shows, however, that there was a small but nevertheless statistically significant decrease in the mean overall satisfaction scores at the first Longitudinal survey – from 7.98 at the first point of survey to 7.50 a year later.
- 6.43 Looking directly at how satisfaction levels compare between the two interviews (see Table 8) broadly confirms patterns reported in previous evaluations. The proportion of re-contacted employers with a lower satisfaction rating than at the initial interview is significantly smaller in Longitudinal survey 3 (39 per cent) and in Longitudinal survey 2 (37 per cent) compared with the Longitudinal Survey 1 (46 per cent). This may indicate that overall satisfaction is stabilising over the long term to a greater extent than seen previously. Nevertheless, while overall satisfaction was found to hold up or increase, among three-fifths (58 per cent) of the employers re-contacted for Longitudinal Survey 3, the findings suggest that there is still some room for improvement in terms of raising employers' satisfaction with the skills brokerage over the long term, for example by ensuring employers are followed up after the initial contact or the first meeting, the key reason for employers to be dissatisfied with the service.

Table 8: Change in overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service in the long term

	New User Sweep 1 to Longitudinal Survey 1	New User Sweep 2 to Longitudinal Survey 2	New User Sweep 3 to Longitudinal Survey 3
Base: All employers having contact with skills broker in past year	740	752	550
	%	%	%
Increased	24	30	28
Stayed the same	27	30	30
Decreased	46	37	39
Don't know (at either new user sweep or at time of recontact)	3	3	3

6.44 Employer satisfaction with the skills brokerage service is more likely to have increased in the long term if:

- the employer has regular ongoing contact with the skills broker (40 per cent, compared with 28 per cent of all employers re-interviewed who had at least one contact with the skills broker in the past year); or
- the employer states that the skills broker has helped them identify training solutions to their skills needs (33 per cent); or
- the employer had accessed fully or partly subsidised training under Train to Gain (31 per cent), or if they had successfully made a claim for a contribution to wage costs (37 per cent).

6.45 These findings are consistent with those of the previous longitudinal survey. It is also worth noting that of those employers who did not have any contact with the skills brokerage service in the year following the first interview, a quarter (24 per cent) would have liked to have been in touch with the skills broker in that period, suggesting that there is scope for more effective follow-up and relationship management on the part of skills brokers.

Comparison of the broker-led and provider-led route in terms of employer's priorities and satisfaction levels

6.46 This section presents findings from the survey of provider-led employers who accessed Train to Gain without any involvement of skills brokers. It explores how provider-led employers rate various factors relating to the advice and guidance received from their college or training provider in terms of importance, and how satisfied they were with the provider in relation to those factors. These findings are then compared to those reported for new user broker-led employers in order to

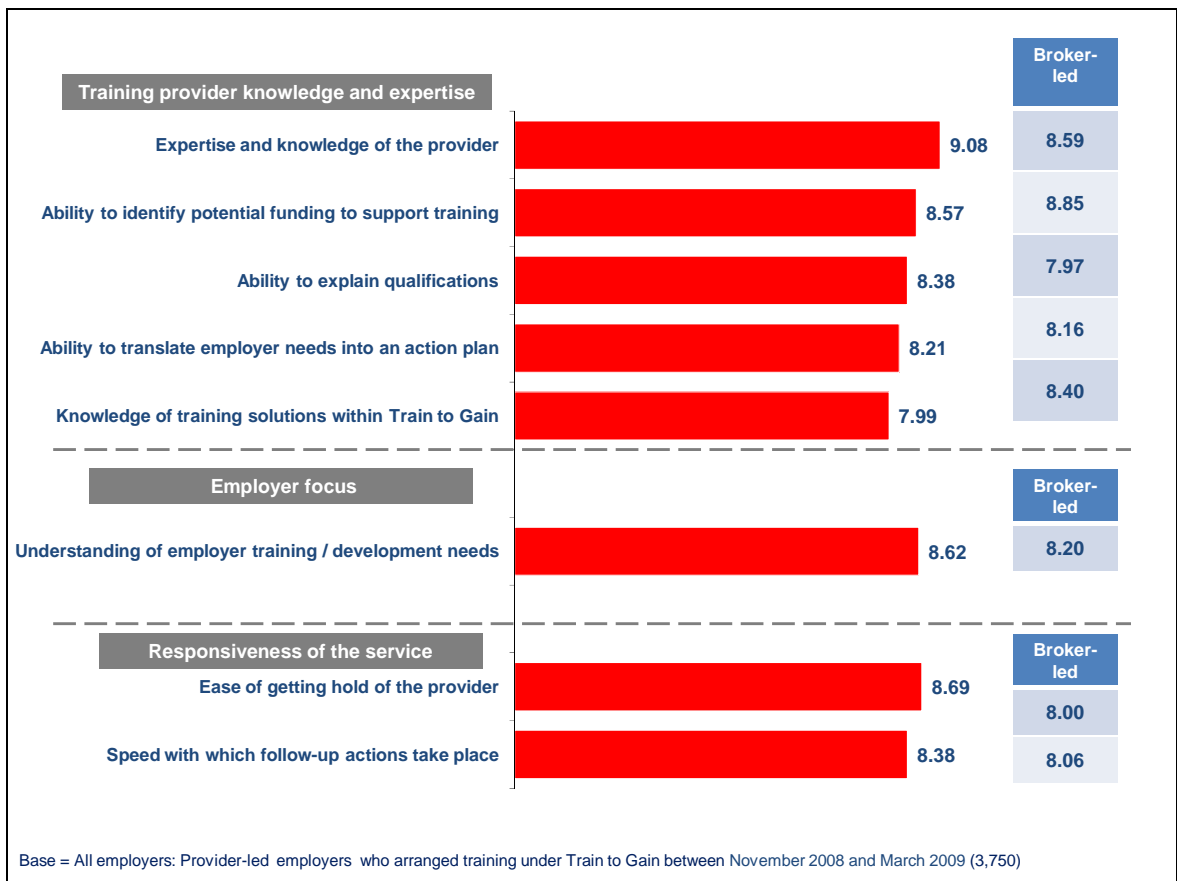
ascertain whether the two cohorts have different priorities in terms of the advice and guidance they seek or require and whether their needs are being met.

6.47 Looking at the importance ratings given by provider-led employers for each specific element relating to advice and guidance, as presented in Figure 13, shows that the range of mean importance scores (7.99 to 9.08 on a scale of 1 to 10) are similar to those given by broker-led employers (7.97 to 8.85). Two factors stand out as being rated amongst the most important elements within both cohorts:

- The expertise and knowledge of the provider/skills broker, although this was rated significantly higher by provider-led employers (mean score of 9.08) compared with broker-led employers (8.59); and
- The ability to identify potential funding to support training activities, which in turn was rated significantly higher by broker-led employers (8.85) compared with provider-led employers (8.57).

6.48 At the same time, provider-led employers gave significantly higher importance scores to the ease with which they could get hold of their provider (8.69) and to their provider's understanding of their training and development needs (8.62) compared with the importance scores given by broker-led employers (8.00 and 8.20 respectively).

Figure 11: Mean importance scores for key measures of the skills advice and guidance received – provider-led engagements



6.49 Satisfaction with these specific elements is high among provider-led employers, with mean scores being above the 6 out of 10 measure taken to imply satisfaction. This indicates that providers are well placed to offer advice and guidance to employers within the wider operation of Train to Gain. The highest levels of satisfaction, as shown in Figure 14, were recorded for:

- the expertise and knowledge of the training provider (mean score 8.25); and
- the ease of getting hold of the provider (mean score 8.02); and
- the ability to identify potential funding to support training (8.01); and the provider's understanding of employer training and development needs (8.00).

6.50 Specific areas where the provider-led employers rated their training providers as having performed less well in relative terms include:

- their knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain (7.52);
- their ability to translate the employer's needs into an action plan (7.63); and
- the speed with which any agreed or required follow-up action is undertaken (7.74).

6.51 Comparing the satisfaction ratings between the two employer cohorts requires some consideration since they differ significantly in terms of their overall experience of Train to Gain in that all provider-led employers have participated in training, while only half (45 per cent) of the broker-led employers took up training discussed with their skills broker. The earlier discussion of overall satisfaction with the skills brokerage service (see paragraph 27) has shown that those broker-led employers who took up training were more likely give a more rounded assessment and higher satisfaction ratings than those who did not take up training. In the interest of comparing like with like it is therefore important to compare the satisfaction ratings given by provider-led employers with those given by broker-led employers who took up some training, as shown in Figure 14.

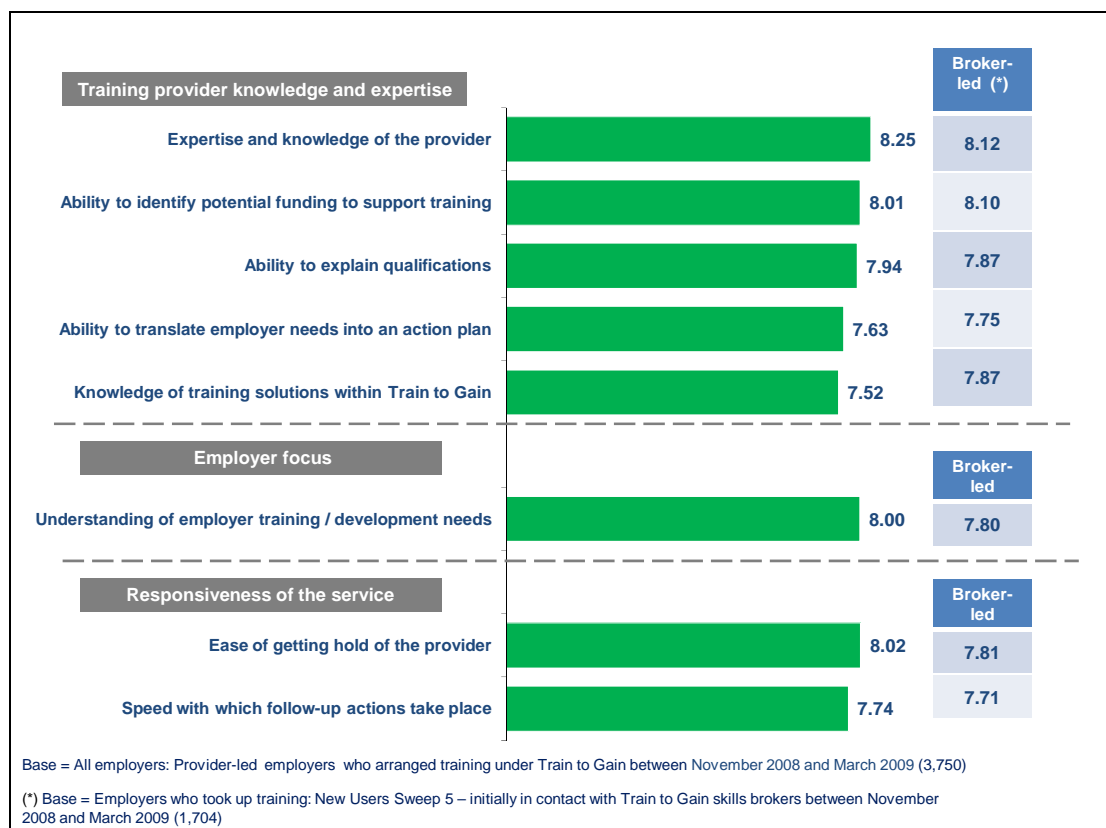
6.52 The mean satisfaction scores given by both cohorts for each specific element of the advice and guidance they received cover a similar range (7.52 to 8.25 for provider-led employers and 7.71 to 8.12 for broker-led employers), indicating that both cohorts experience similar levels of satisfaction. Provider-led employers, however, were significantly more satisfied with a number of advice and guidance elements, including:

- The ease of getting hold of their provider (8.02 vs. 7.81);
- the provider's understanding of their training and development needs (8.00 vs. 7.80); and the expertise and knowledge of their provider (8.25 vs. 8.12) for broker-led employers who rated their skills broker on this element.

6.53 Conversely, employers engaged into Train to Gain by a skills broker were significantly more satisfied with two elements of the advice and guidance they received, including:

- Their skills broker’s knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain (7.87 vs. 7.52 for provider-led employers who rated their provider on this element); and
- Their ability to translate employer needs into an action plan (7.75 vs. 7.63);

Figure 12: Mean satisfaction scores for key measures of advice and guidance received from the provider – provider-led engagements



6.54 After giving their importance and satisfaction ratings for the specific elements of the advice and guidance service of Train to Gain, provider-led employers were asked to rate their overall satisfaction (on the same scale from 1 to 10).

6.55 Overall, almost nine in ten (87 per cent) of those employers who accessed Train to Gain via a college or training provider were satisfied with the guidance and advice service they received as a whole. Almost three quarters were very satisfied (73 per cent), giving a score of at least 8 out of 10. As Table 9 shows, overall satisfaction is equally high among broker-led employers who took up training, indicating that the majority of employers are satisfied whichever route they take in accessing advice and guidance within Train to Gain.

Table 9: Employer satisfaction with the guidance and advice received – broker-led and provider-led engagements comparison

	New User broker-led employers Sweep 5 (Nov 08–Mar 09)	Provider-led employers Sweep 1 (Nov 08–Mar 09)
Base: All employers who took up training	1,704	3,750
‘Satisfied’ – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 6 and 10	87%	87%
‘Very satisfied’ – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 8 and 10	73%	73%
‘Dissatisfied’ – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 1 and 4	6%	7%
Mean overall satisfaction with the advice and guidance received	8.09	8.16

6.56 Seven percent of provider-led employers were dissatisfied with the service they received, giving a score of 4 or less out of 10. This compares to a similar proportion found amongst the broker-led employers who took up training (6 per cent).

6.57 Those employers who voiced their dissatisfaction were asked to elaborate on their negative experience with the advice and guidance service received from their training provider, as Table 10 shows. Mirroring the experience of those broker-led employers who took up training, provider-led employers most frequently complained about a lack of contact with their training provider and that the provider did not get back to them. However, a number of significant differences between the two routes of engagement emerged, including:

- Only a quarter of dissatisfied provider-led employers (23 per cent) mentioned lack of contact since the first meeting as an issue, while the proportion of dissatisfied broker-led employers citing this reason was almost twice as high (43 per cent).
- However, dissatisfied provider-led employers were more likely to complain about a lack of follow-up actions (20 per cent) vis-à-vis dissatisfied broker-led employers (7 per cent). These differences may well be related to the specific expectations employers had at the time of their first meeting, i.e. it is likely that employers who were in touch with a provider were primarily concerned about arranging training for their staff, while employers in contact with skills brokers may have had higher expectations regarding a more broader, and more long term, guidance and advice service.

6.58 This may also clarify why dissatisfied provider-led employers were more likely to complain of a lack of professionalism (23 per cent) compared to dissatisfied broker-led employers (3 per cent). Some of the complaints made by dissatisfied provider-led employers in terms of a lack of professionalism revolve around providers changing appointments to unreasonable dates, failing to turn up at agreed dates, delays and administrative errors, and general experiences of poor customer service.

6.59 At the same time, employers’ differential expectations of the service seem to be reflected in the tendency for more dissatisfied broker-led employers to complain about

receiving irrelevant advice (12 per cent) and about their skills broker's lack of knowledge or failure to explain things (12 per cent) compared with dissatisfied provider-led employers (6 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively).

Table 10: Reasons for dissatisfaction with the guidance and advice received from training providers

	Proportion of employers
Base: Provider-led employers dissatisfied with the guidance and advice	257
	%
Lack of contact since the first meeting	23
Lack of professionalism	23
Problems with training provision	21
Complete lack of follow-up actions from the provider	20
Employer felt misled or misinformed	9
Employer felt the provider was 'all talk and no action'	8
The training was irrelevant or not what the employer wanted	7
The advice was irrelevant or not what the employer wanted	6
Process of accessing the service has taken too long / took too long	6
Provider showed a lack of interest or did not listen to what employer wanted	6
The training was not beneficial	5
The provider lacked knowledge or understanding of the business or industry	4
Process of accessing the service was too complex, bureaucratic or involved too much paperwork	4
Training provider contacts kept changing or did not pass information onto their replacement	4
The training provider lacked knowledge or didn't explain things	2
Did not receive the promised funding	2
Funding was not explained properly	1
Advice was not impartial	1
Could do the job ourselves / didn't provide anything new / not instrumental in organising training / ended up sourcing training myself	1
Weren't able to source local training provision / training too far away	*
Other	3
Don't know	1

6.60 A similar multivariate analysis to that used for Sweep 5 broker-led employers was run to identify which of the individual aspects of the advice and guidance received from the training provider had the most influence on overall satisfaction with these advice and guidance services. The same process was undertaken to convert the ten-point scale satisfaction scores into binary variables, and then to weight these by employer ratings of importance for that factor. The analysis indicates that the probability of overall satisfaction with the advice and guidance received from the Train to Gain provider is greater when employers indicate satisfaction with particular aspects of the service. The factors that were found to significantly determine overall satisfaction with the service are, in descending order of significance:

- the expertise and knowledge of the training provider adviser;
- the ability of the provider staff to explain various types of accreditation and qualifications;
- the speed with which the training provider is seen to carry out agreed follow-up actions; and
- the capability of the provider in terms of translating company needs into an action plan.

6.61 This is a very different pattern to that seen for Sweep 5 broker-led employer views on advice and guidance received through the skills brokerage service, with adviser knowledge (with regard to the training landscape in general and specific qualification and accreditation frameworks) having more of an impact on overall satisfaction amongst provider-led employers. The performance of the adviser or skills broker in helping the employer translate their ideas about their skills and training needs into a practical action plan, and in following this up with swift action to move employees into training, are of key importance in driving overall satisfaction in both broker-led and provider-led cohorts.

Combined broker-led and provider-led overall satisfaction with the skills advice

6.62 Finally, this last section of this chapter presents the overall satisfaction of employers with the advice and guidance service received from both skills brokers and from colleges or training providers. Again, some caution is needed when interpreting the combined survey data, since the two survey samples do not match directly in terms of their population characteristics and experience with Train to Gain.

Table 11: Employer satisfaction with the guidance and advice received – Combined broker-led and provider-led engagements

	Combined broker-led and provider-led surveys	
<i>Base:</i>	All employers	All employers who took up training
	7,500	5,454
‘Satisfied’ – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 6 and 10	85%	87%
‘Very satisfied’ – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 8 and 10	70%	73%
‘Dissatisfied’ – Proportion of employers giving satisfaction score of between 1 and 4	7%	7%

6.63 Overall, combined satisfaction with advice and guidance provided to employers through Train to Gain is high, as Table 11 shows. More than four out of five of all employers were satisfied (85 per cent) giving a score of at least 6 out of 10. More than two thirds (70 per cent) are very satisfied. A small minority of seven per cent were dissatisfied. Considering only those broker-led employers who took up training (as in the right column of Table 15) shows similar overall combined satisfaction ratings. This indicates that the majority of employers are satisfied with the guidance and advice they receive whichever route they take in accessing Train to Gain.

Future demand

6.64 Reflecting the high levels of satisfaction, future demand for the service is likely to be substantial. Over three-quarters of Sweep 5 broker-led employers (80 per cent) would be likely or very likely to use the Train to Gain service again in the future. Most of these expect to engage in Train to Gain training (79 per cent) and/or to be in contact with their skills broker to assess further (or to reassess) the organisation’s skills and training needs (76 per cent).

6.65 Around a sixth of broker-led employers (15 per cent) said they were unlikely to use the Train to Gain service again in the future. In two-fifths of cases, the reasons focussed on issues to do with the skills brokerage service while in approximately a third of cases it related to negative views on training. These findings reflect those documented at Sweep 4.

6.66 Likelihood of re-engaging with the Train to Gain service increases amongst those employers who had taken up Train to Gain training. Over nine in ten broker-led employers (93%) who had trained through Train to Gain would be likely or very likely to use the service again. Amongst provider-led employers this figure stands at 95%

7 The impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity

Key findings

- 7.1 Sweep 5 of the broker-led employer evaluation confirms a considerable degree of take-up of training which can be attributed to the work of Train to Gain skills brokers. This is clearly encouraging, particularly in the context of the current recession.
- 7.2 After being in contact with a skills broker, 45 percent of broker-led employers had taken up some training, which is the highest proportion recorded since Sweep 2 (51 per cent). Almost two thirds (63 per cent) had committed to training, i.e. either undertaken or scheduled training under Train to Gain.
- 7.3 Indicating increased employer investment in training arranged under Train to Gain, about half of the broker-led employers who accessed training made some contribution to the costs of this training (51 per cent, up from 44 percent in Sweep 4). At the same time, the proportion of employers who train and access full subsidies has decreased consistently since Sweep 1 (68 per cent) and is now at 54 per cent. Take-up and awareness of the offer of a contribution to wage costs is relatively low.
- 7.4 The take-up of the Leadership and Management training offer under Train to Gain has increased from one in nine (12 per cent) of the broker-led employers at Sweep 4 to one in five (18 per cent) at Sweep 5. This has become an important factor in employers' decision to become involved with Train to Gain.
- 7.5 Take-up of training under Train to Gain increases in the long term, as the longitudinal survey shows. A third of those employers who had taken up training at the time of the first interview went on to arrange further training. One in five employers who initially had no training scheduled reported that they arranged some training under Train to Gain in the subsequent 12 months.
- 7.6 Provider-led engagements differ significantly from the broker-led route in a number of ways. Employers accessing Train to Gain via a training provider are more likely to arrange training at Level 2 or higher than broker-led employers. Provider-led employers were found to be significantly less likely to make some contribution to the training costs (21 per cent) compared to broker-led employers (51 per cent)..

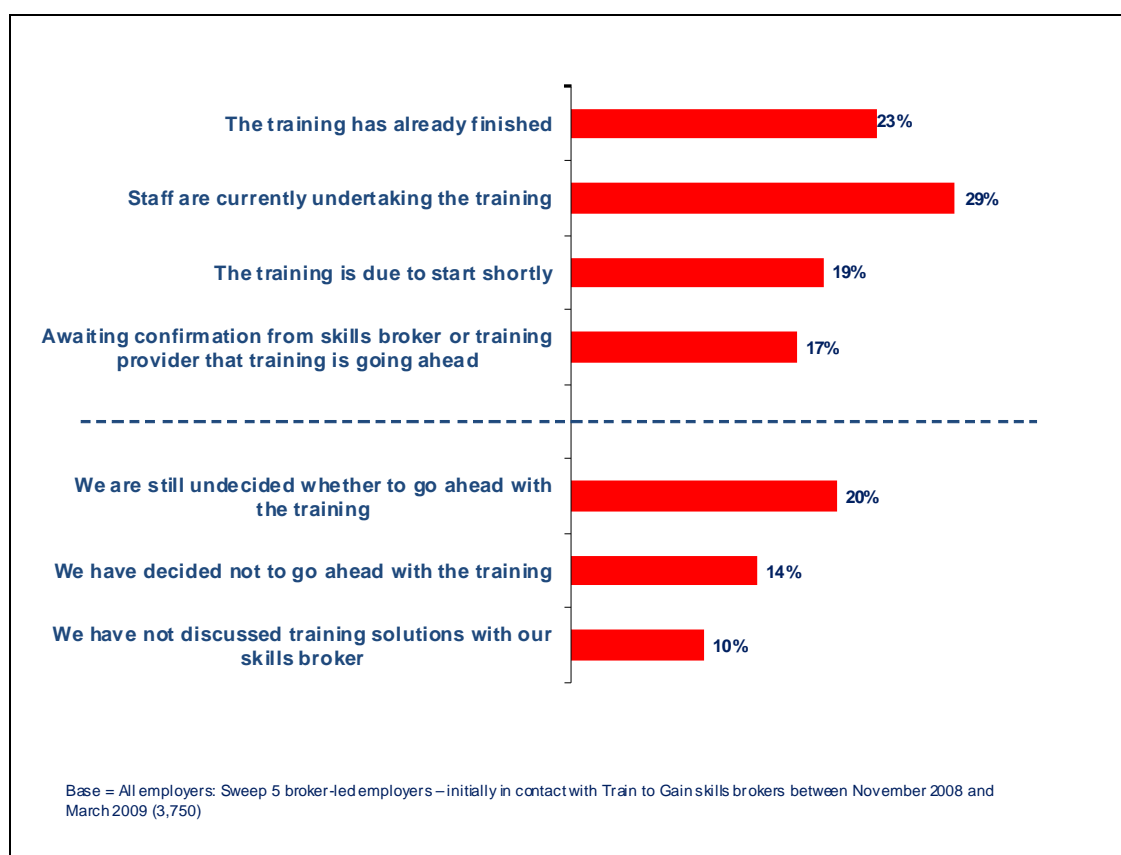
Introduction

- 7.7 One of the key aims of Train to Gain is to stimulate demand for training among employers and to encourage businesses to invest more in training activity for the benefit of their employees and their organisation and its wider business performance. The employer evaluation assesses the extent to which the Train to Gain service has been successful in encouraging employer training activity, both in the short term (in the months following the initial contact) and in the longer term (18 to 20 months after this initial contact). In addition, this chapter explores the impact of the training reported by those employers who accessed Train to Gain via a training provider.
- 7.8 Broker-led employers were asked whether they had accessed, or were planning to access, training provision as a direct result of the discussions they had had with their skills broker. Provider-led employers were included in the survey if they have taken up training through Train to Gain following a contact with a college or training provider. We refer to any training activity prompted by the skills brokerage intervention as training undertaken 'through Train to Gain'. It should be noted that this does not, therefore, apply exclusively to training subsidised through the Train to Gain funding stream.

The impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity in the short term

- 7.9 The broker-led employer evaluation has provided consistent evidence of the impact of the skills brokerage service on employers' take-up of training solutions. Figure 15 shows the proportion of Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers who were at different stages of Train to Gain training following discussions with the skills broker. The figure shows the training status of broker-led employers at the time of the Sweep 5 survey in June to August 2009, two to eight months after the initial contact with the skills brokerage service (between November 2008 and March 2009).
- 7.10 Among Sweep 5 broker-led employers, at the time of the initial survey, almost a quarter (23 per cent) of the cohort had already had some staff complete a course of training, which they had arranged after discussions with the skills broker – this is significantly higher than found at Sweep 4 (19 per cent). Three in 10 (29 per cent) reported that some of their staff were currently undertaking a course of training through Train to Gain. Employers who had staff that had already finished training, or who had staff in training at the time of the survey, are referred to in the rest of this section as having 'taken up' Train to Gain training.
- 7.11 One employer in seven (14 per cent) had decided not to undertake any training, which is a significant reduction compared with Sweep 4 (17 per cent). A further one in 10 (10 per cent) had not actually got to the stage of having a full discussion regarding their training and development options within the context of the Train to Gain service.

Figure 13: Take-up of Train to Gain training in the short term – Sweep 5 broker-led employers



Note: Employers could give more than one answer to this question for different blocks of training or different groups of learners engaging with the training. For instance, one employer may have had some staff who had finished a course of Train to Gain training, and some staff still waiting to go ahead. Therefore, the figures shown sum to over 100 per cent.

7.12 As a group, those Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had already had staff undertake training are described in the following section as having ‘taken up’ Train to Gain training (45 per cent). As Table 12 shows, this is significantly higher than found amongst Sweep 4 employers (42 per cent). The increase in employers taking up training as a result of their contact with a skills broker is particularly encouraging in the context of the current recession.

7.13 Adding to this group all those employers who had training scheduled or were waiting for confirmation makes the group that is ‘committed’ to Train to Gain training. Around three in five (63 per cent) of all the broker-led employers surveyed in Sweep 5 had ‘committed’ to training as a result of contact with the skills broker, by the time of the first interview. This figure is again higher than found at Sweep 4 of the broker-led employer evaluation (61 per cent) and approaching the highest level of employers committed to training under Train to Gain, which was recorded at Sweep 2 (65 per cent).

Table 12: Commitment to and take-up of training in the short term, as a result of discussions with a Train to Gain skills broker, by evaluation sweep

	Base	Initial contact made	Point of survey	'Commitment' to Train to Gain training	'Take-up' of Train to Gain training
Sweep 1	3,759	Jan–Apr 07	Jun–Jul 07	64%	42%
Sweep 2	3,976	May–Oct 07	Jan–Mar 08	65%	51%
Sweep 3	3,753	Nov 07–Apr 08	Jun–Aug 08	62%	44%
Sweep 4	3,750	May–Oct 08	Jan–Mar 09	61%	42%
Sweep 5	3,750	Nov 08– Mar 09	Jun–Aug 09	63%	45%

7.14 The impact of the initial skills brokerage intervention on employers' propensity to commit to training activity increases with the size of the employer establishment. The smallest employers (with 1–4 employees) are the least likely to have committed to training in the short term, although still just over half (53 per cent) had done so. Table 13 highlights the way in which the commitment rates increase as employer size increases among Sweep 5 broker-led employers.

Table 13: Sweep 5 broker-led employers: Commitment to and take-up of training in the short term as a result of discussions with a Train to Gain skills broker, by employer size

Number of employees	Base	'Commitment' to Train to Gain training	'Take-up' of Train to Gain training
1 to 4	860	53%	37%
5 to 9	772	64%	44%
10 to 49	1533	67%	48%
50 to 249	462	67%	54%
250 plus	121	68%	52%
Overall	3,750	63%	45%

Reasons for not taking up training following contact with the Train to Gain skills broker

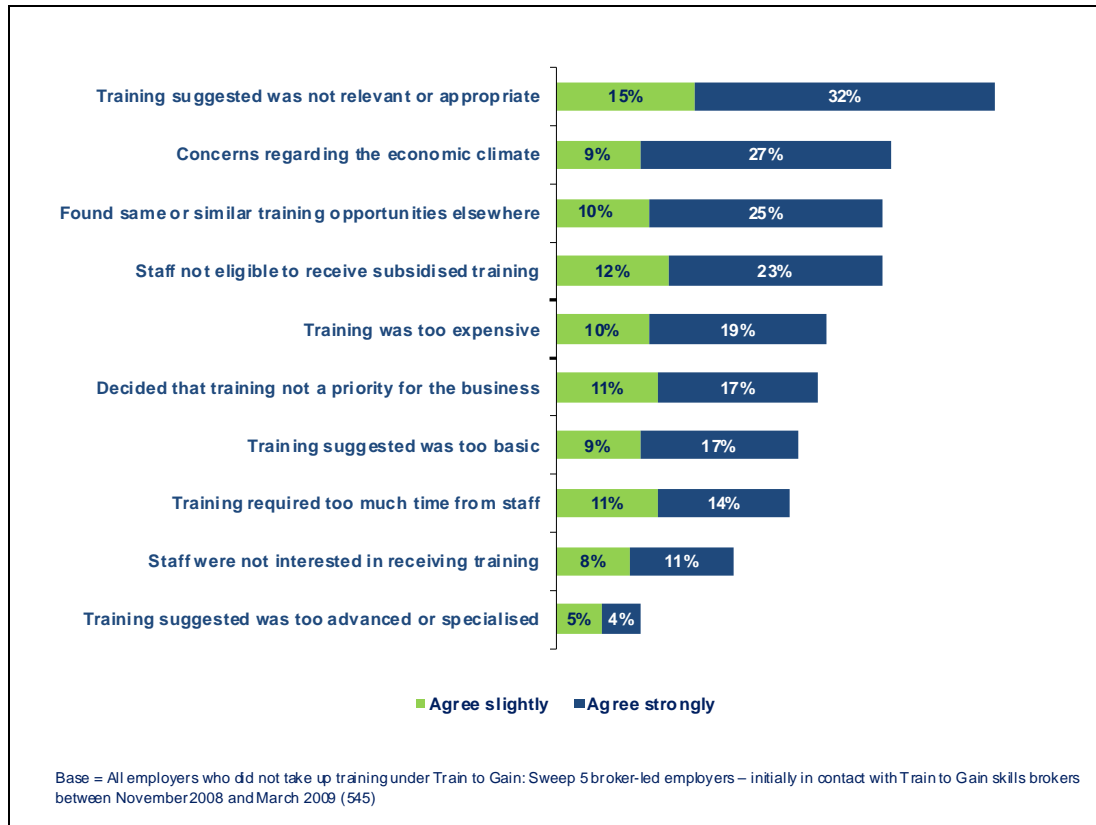
7.15 Those employers who did not to take up or schedule any training for staff following the initial contact with the skills broker were asked, on a prompted basis, why they had been reluctant to engage with Train to Gain training.

7.16 Figure 14 shows the proportion of those Sweep 5 broker-led employers who agreed (slightly or strongly) that a number of key factors played a part in their decision not to take up training. While a substantial proportion of employers agreed with most of the factors, there were three factors that stood out as being particularly likely to influence employers against training (with a high proportion agreeing strongly), namely:

- the training suggested was not appropriate or relevant to their organisation at that time (32 per cent agreed strongly);

- the employer had concerns over the current economic climate (27 per cent); and
- the employer had found the same or similar training opportunities outside Train to Gain (25 per cent agreed strongly).

Figure 14: Reasons for not taking up training through Train to Gain – Sweep 5 broker-led employers



7.17 There is evidence of a growing concern over the economic climate amongst broker-led employers across the last three Sweeps of the evaluation. At Sweep 3, when the employers who had had an initial contact with a Train to Gain skills broker in November 2007 to April 2008 were surveyed, 6 per cent of those employers who had decided not to take up training said that this was because training was not a priority for their business in the challenging economic climate. When Sweep 4 employers were asked for the first time on a prompted basis whether concerns about the economic climate had had any influence on their decisions about taking up training, almost three in 10 of those employers who had decided against engagement with training (28 per cent) agreed that this was the case. In Sweep 5 this figure has now increased to more than a third (35 per cent). Employers' take-up of training, their views on Train to Gain, and impact of the economic downturn are explored in more depth in Chapter 9.

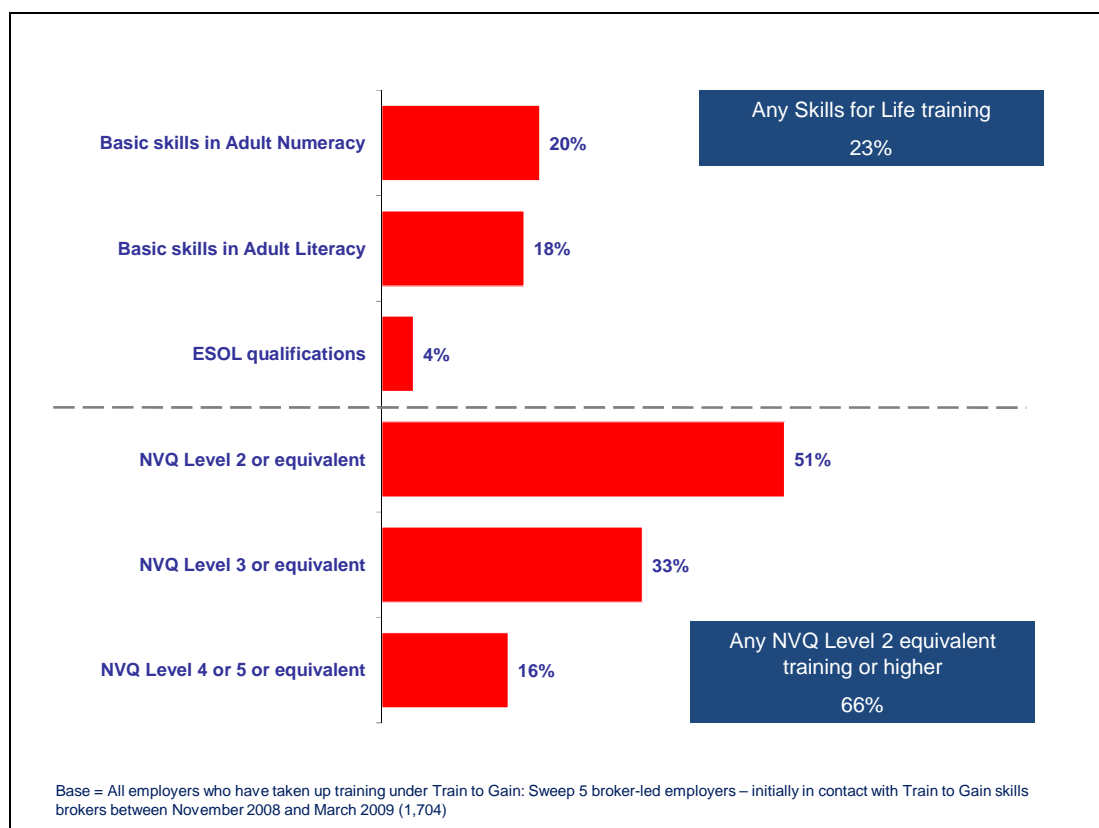
7.18 Many of those employers who did not take up training agreed that this was because staff did not meet the eligibility criteria for receipt of subsidised training (36 per cent). In addition, more than a quarter (29 per cent) decided against the training because it was felt to be too expensive. This indicates that the availability of funding is a crucial element in employer's decision making when it comes to training. The lack of funding

as such, concerns over training being too expensive, a lack of explanation regarding funding rules, and a perceived misinformation about funding also featured among the reasons for employer's dissatisfaction with the skills brokerage service (see Table 10 in Chapter 7).

Profile of training accessed through Train to Gain

- 7.19 New user broker-led employers accessed a variety of different types of training provision in the short term following the initial engagement by a Train to Gain skills broker. Figure 17 shows the proportion of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who have taken up training through Train to Gain, using different types of training providers and choosing different delivery formats. As some of the employers had arranged various courses of training for staff through Train to Gain at the time of survey, there is a degree of overlap in the groups of employers using different providers or different formats of training (and thus the data for each element of the figure sums to over 100 per cent).
- 7.20 The majority of employers who arranged some training soon after discussion with a skills broker used either a private training provider or consultant (71 per cent) or a further education (FE) college (35 per cent) to deliver this training. Compared with Sweep 4, this had meant a significant increase in the use of private training providers (64 per cent) and a decrease of employers using FE colleges (43 per cent). One in six employers (17 per cent) had been prompted by the skills broker to arrange a course of training delivered by in-house staff.
- 7.21 By far the most common delivery formats for Train to Gain training were taught courses delivered on site (60 per cent, significantly lower than the 64 per cent found at Sweep 4) or training delivered off site (52 per cent) by an external training provider or college.
- 7.22 In terms of the level of training accessed through Train to Gain in the short term, two thirds of those employers who had taken up training (66 per cent) had some employees who had achieved (or were working towards) a qualification at Level 2 or above (in many cases specifically at Level 2). A third (33 per cent) had accessed training at Level 3. Just under a quarter (23 per cent) had accessed training designed to lead to a Skills for Life qualification in adult numeracy, adult literacy or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Figure 15: The proportion of employers accessing training at different levels in the short term as a result of discussion with a Train to Gain skills broker – Sweep 5 broker-led employers



7.23 Across Sweeps 1 to 5 of the broker-led employer evaluation, there has been a tendency for significantly fewer employers to access Skills for Life and Level 2 qualifications. There has been a corresponding increased focus on Level 3 training between Sweep 1 (33 per cent) and Sweep 4 (38 per cent), but the proportion of employers arranging training for staff at Level 3 has not been sustained at Sweep 5.

Involvement with leadership and management training

7.24 Employers' take-up of Leadership and Management training has been specifically monitored since Sweep 4 (employers interviewed between January and March 2009) after the Leadership and Management training offer under Train to Gain had been extended to businesses with 5 to 10 employees in November 2008. At Sweep 5 – after the introduction of a new set of flexible 'bite sized' learning programmes for SMEs supported by Train to Gain in January 2009 – a third (29 per cent) of new user broker-led employers stated that the provision of Leadership and Management training was a very important factor in their decision to become involved with Train to Gain (as discussed in Chapter 5).

7.25 In total, one in five of the Sweep 5 broker-led employers (18 per cent) reported that some of their management staff had received some Leadership and Management

training, coaching or mentoring, following an initial contact with the Train to Gain skills broker. This is a significant increase compared to Sweep 4 (12 per cent).

- 7.26 The findings indicate that there is an increasing enthusiasm among small and medium sized employers for taking up Leadership and Management training opportunities on offer under the new, flexible 'bite-sized' training programme for SMEs. This has been confirmed by the findings of the recent qualitative research which supported the case that the new measures introduced under Train to Gain are meeting the needs of employers, particularly in the context of the recession. Similarly, the recent Education and Skills report published by the CBI found that the Leadership and Management programme is "delivering benefits to its target audience" (CBI, 2009).

Funding of training activity

- 7.27 Train to Gain offers a range of subsidies which are designed to stimulate demand for training, particularly during the current economic recession. However, Train to Gain also aims at encouraging continued employer investment in staff training in order to improve the skills of their workforce and move businesses forward in a joint partnership between the Government and employers. It is therefore important to ascertain the extent to which employers have contributed to funding training provision as a vehicle to assess the performance of the Train to Gain service against its key objectives.
- 7.28 Table 14 shows, for each sweep of the broker-led employer evaluation, the proportion of those employers that have undertaken training who have accessed different levels of subsidies for this training activity. Again, it should be noted that, because employers could have accessed various courses of training for staff by this point, with different funding arrangements for each, the figures for the proportion of employers accessing fully subsidised, partly subsidised and wholly unsubsidised training in each column sum to over 100 per cent.

Table 14: The proportion of employers accessing subsidies for training conducted in the short term as a result of discussion with a Train to Gain skills broker

	Sweep 1	Sweep 2	Sweep 3	Sweep 4	Sweep 5
Base: All employers taking up training through Train to Gain	1,584	1,914	1,592	1,543	1,704
Fully subsidised training	68%	62%	58%	62%	54%
Partly subsidised training – employer paid:	29%	35%	38%	35%	43%
Nearly all of the costs	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Most of the costs	2%	3%	4%	3%	4%
Roughly half the costs	12%	18%	19%	15%	17%
Less than half the costs	12%	11%	11%	14%	20%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Wholly unsubsidised training	12%	13%	16%	12%	13%
Don't know	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%

- 7.29 Overall, just over half of those employers that took up training arranged at least some training for staff that was fully subsidised through Train to Gain in Sweep 5 (54 per cent). The majority of employers who accessed full subsidies through Train to Gain received this for all training (85 per cent, equivalent to 46 per cent of all employers who took up training), indicating that at this point they had not accessed any other training through Train to Gain to which they had made a contribution.
- 7.30 Two-fifths of employers who had taken up training (43 per cent) had accessed some provision on a part-subsidised basis – in most cases (85 per cent), the employer was likely to have had to contribute only around half of the costs (or less). One employer in eight (13 per cent) had, following skills brokerage intervention, accessed at least some training that they had paid for in full themselves.
- 7.31 In total, half (51 per cent) of employers who accessed training had made some contribution to the costs. This is a significant increase compared to Sweep 4, where two fifths (44%) of employers had made some contribution to costs. This means that more employers are investing in training taken up under Train to Gain.
- 7.32 Correspondingly, there has been a relatively consistent decrease in the proportion of employers accessing full subsidies for training conducted as a result of discussions with a Train to Gain skills broker since the first sweep of the employer evaluation. The lower level of employers accessing full subsidies after Sweep 1 may be the result of a declining pool of eligible employers over time, however, it testifies that more employers are making a financial commitment to co-financing training accessed under Train to Gain.

Contribution to wage costs

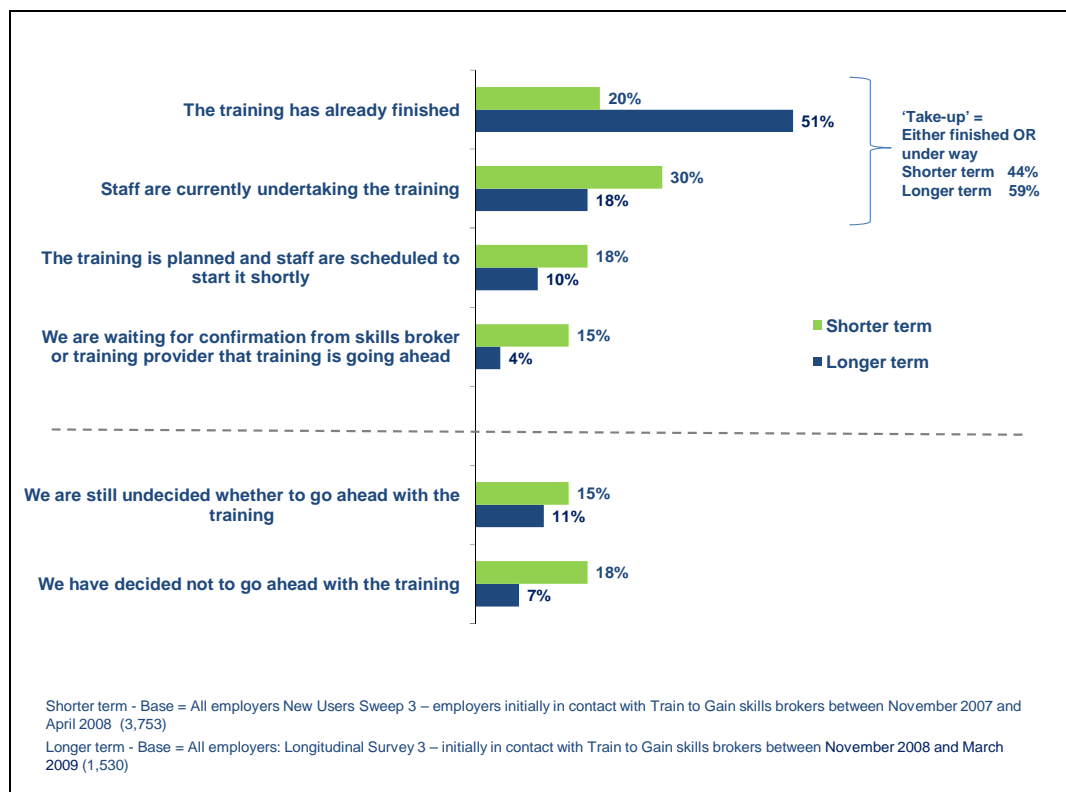
- 7.33 One of the key areas explored in more depth at Sweep 5 than in previous sweeps of the employer evaluation was the offer of a contribution to wage costs for employers training under Train to Gain. Employers with fewer than 50 full time equivalent (FTE) staff are eligible to apply for a contribution to wage costs for every employee released during their normal working hours in order to be trained under Train to Gain, as long as they achieve a first, full Level 2, or a Basic Skills qualification, or progress straight to a Level 3 within Train to Gain without having completed a Level 2 qualification (Level 3 'jumpers'). The contribution to wage costs can be claimed when employees have achieved their approved qualification and can be £5 per hour or the actual hourly rate paid to the learner, with the employer choosing which rate is claimed. A maximum of 70 hours per eligible learner in total can be claimed, which relates to paid release during normal working hours, for time spent with the assessor or trainer from the training provider.
- 7.34 The proportion of eligible employers — who made a claim was relatively low, with only 7 per cent of employers deciding to take up this offer under Train to Gain. This figure is based on all employers with less than 50 staff who had employees working during normal working hours.
- 7.35 Employers mentioned a variety of reasons for not making use of the wage contribution offer, chief of which was that many employers were simply not aware of it. Almost two thirds of eligible employers who did not claim (65 per cent) said they were not aware of the offer. The relatively low take-up of the wage compensation offer may reflect different business needs and priorities, but there may also be room for a targeted marketing approach to promote the wage contribution offer among these groups. A further 10 per cent felt that it was not necessary or not worth the effort for the amount that could be claimed.
- 7.36 Of those employers who did make a claim for a contribution to wage costs, more than two fifths (45 per cent) did so for their full-time employees, a fifth (21 per cent) for their part-time employees, and a third for both (33 per cent).
- 7.37 Just under half of those employers who made a claim reported that their application was successful (47 per cent) while two fifths (38 per cent) were still waiting for a decision at the time of the interview, and the remaining 14 per cent were unsuccessful or did not know about the outcome of their claim for contribution to wage costs.
- 7.38 Part of the motivation for employers to take advantage of this offer was the current economic climate, which influenced half of the employers in their decision to make a claim (49 per cent); over a quarter (29 per cent) said that the economic climate influenced them 'a great deal'.

The impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity in the longer term

7.39 In order to investigate the longer-term impact on training activity, a sub-set of Sweep 3 broker-led employers was followed up one year after the initial interview, as part of the third longitudinal survey (in June to August 2009). Figure 16 shows the training status of these employers at both points. When interviewed a few months after the initial skills brokerage contact, a fifth (20 per cent) of these employers had completed some training. By the second interview, half of employers (51 per cent) had had staff complete training initiated as a result of discussions with their Train to Gain skills broker.

7.40 In total, the proportion of employers with Train to Gain training completed or under way increased from 44 per cent in the short term to 59 per cent a year later.

Figure 16: Take-up of training through Train to Gain in the short and long term

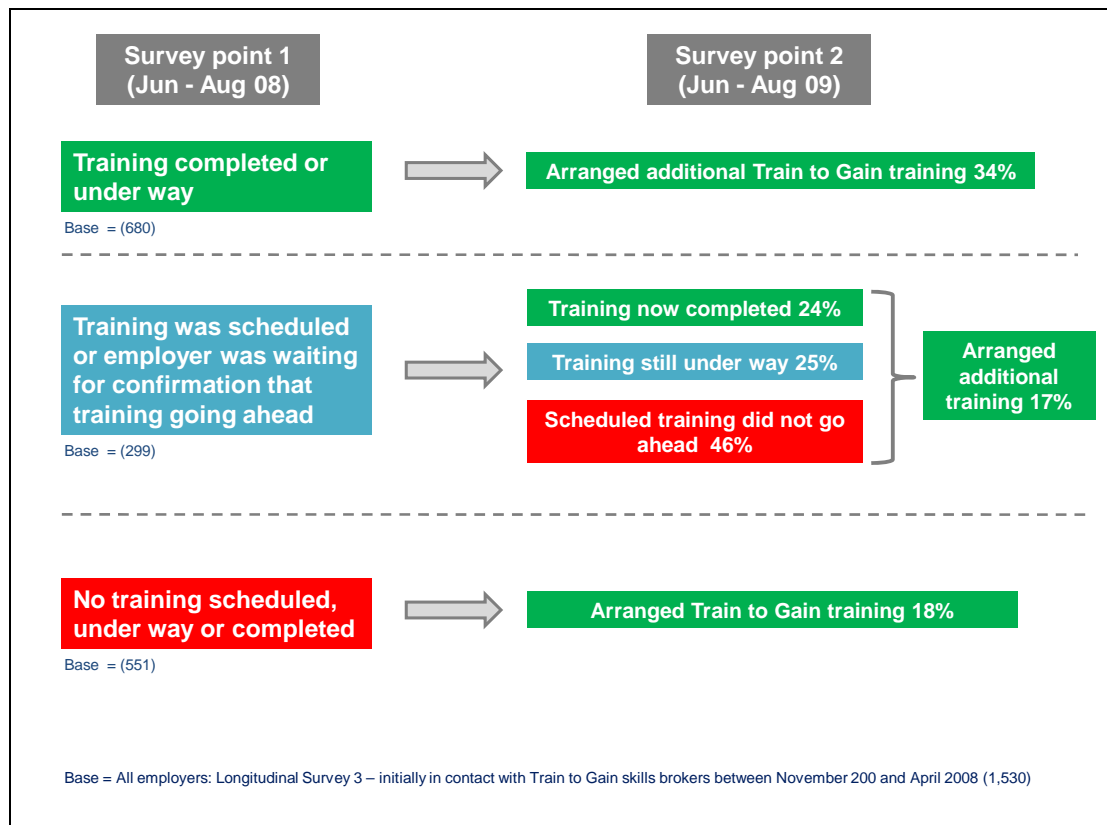


Note: Employers could give more than one answer to this question for different blocks of training or different groups of learners engaging with the training. For instance, one employer may have had some staff who had finished a course of Train to Gain training, and some staff still waiting to go ahead. Therefore the figures shown for each point in time sum to over 100 per cent.

7.41 In order to track the pattern of engagement and re-engagement with Train to Gain provision over the first one or two years following contact with the skills broker, it is useful to look at the training activity of different groups of employers. Among employers interviewed both in mid 2008 and a year later, in 2009, it is possible to show, for example, whether training under way or planned at the initial survey was

actually completed, and whether any additional provision was taken up in the following year. Figure 17 splits the cohort into three groups according to their status at the first survey (in terms of whether they accessed Train to Gain training after contact with the skills broker), and then describes the subsequent activity through Train to Gain over the following year.

Figure 17: Additional training activity through Train to Gain following the initial survey



7.42 Overall, the data from the Longitudinal survey 3 – in line with the previous Longitudinal survey 2 – indicates an increase in the proportion of employers actively involved with Train to Gain training over time, driven by both subsequent engagement of employers who did not train initially, and continuing or additional training activity undertaken by those who did.

7.43 The longitudinal perspective of the training activity of broker-led employers shows that the long term conversion and re-engagement rates are relatively high. Among those employers who had already taken up training at the time of their first interview, there was a relatively high re-engagement rate, with a third (34 per cent) having arranged another programme of training through Train to Gain by the time of the second interview. This was defined as any additional training that had been arranged as a direct result of discussions the employer had had with their skills broker. The majority of the employers who had taken up further training opportunities (72 per cent) had continued contact with their skills brokerage organisation during this time, suggesting the importance of ongoing advice and skills brokerage in prompting the employer to

continue training in the long term. Most of those employers that arranged further training through Train to Gain had received full or part subsidies for at least some of this activity (83 per cent).

- 7.44 As found in Longitudinal Survey 2, the initial training that employers were planning through Train to Gain did not actually take place in a substantial proportion of cases. This applies to over two-fifths of cases (46 per cent) where the employer reported in mid 2008 that staff were scheduled to undertake training or where the employer reported that they were waiting for confirmation from a skills broker or a training provider that training was going ahead.
- 7.45 Where employers had not committed to training through Train to Gain after the initial contact with the skills broker, around one in six (18 per cent) went on in the subsequent 12 months to access training that could be attributed to the Train to Gain intervention.
- 7.46 However, not every employer translated the initial discussion with the skills broker into a concrete training plan, and the third longitudinal survey explored the reasons why employers decided against taking up the training offer. Reflecting the current economic climate, employers most frequently agreed to the following prompted statements indicating possible reasons for not engaging in training:
- Concerns regarding the economic downturn and financial crisis (40 per cent agreed strongly and 16 agreed slightly);
 - Staff were not eligible to receive subsidised training (29 per cent agreed strongly and 17 agreed slightly); and
 - The training was too expensive (26 per cent agreed strongly and 9 agreed slightly).
- 7.47 These findings from the third longitudinal survey of broker-led employers are in line with those found among the Sweep 5 broker-led employers, however, issues around training cost and subsidies appear to have become more important reasons for not taking up training in the long term.

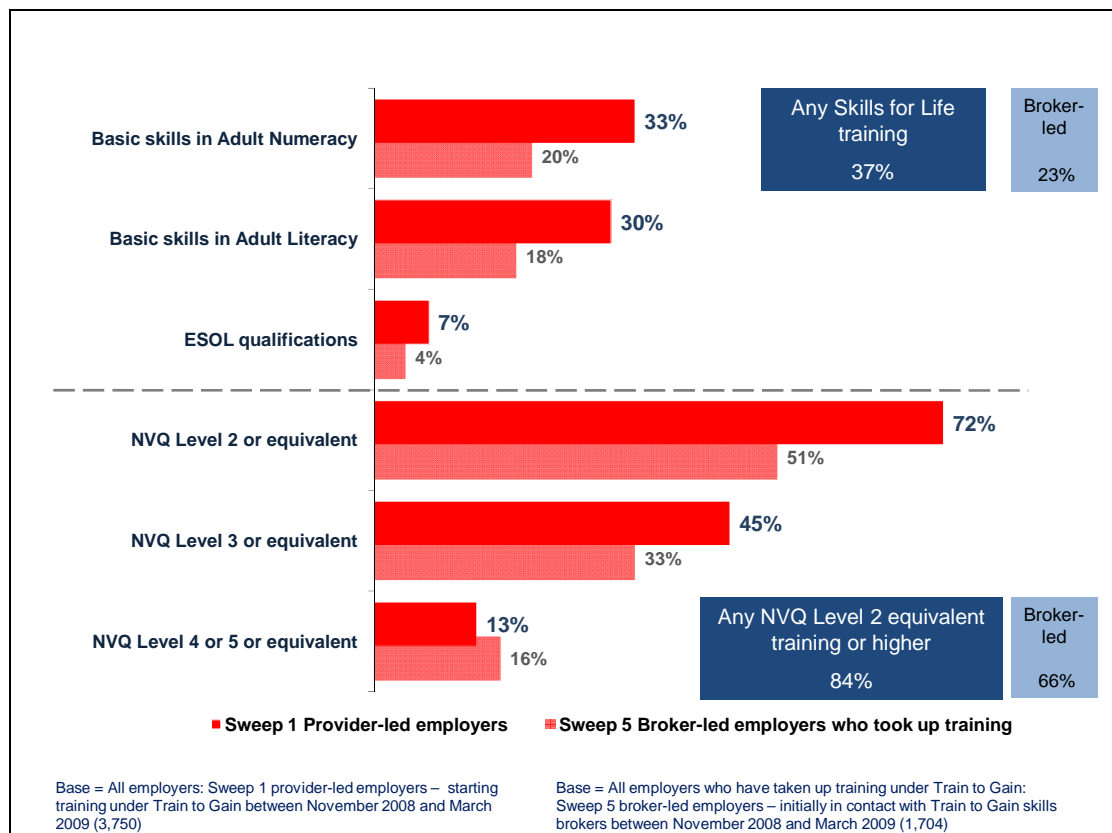
Comparing the impact of Train to Gain on training activity of employers accessing the training via the broker-led and the provider-led routes

- 7.48 This section presents the findings of the provider-led survey, which included employers who were not engaged by a skills broker but who accessed Train to Gain directly via a college or training provider and started their training between November 2007 and March 2008. The section explores the profile of training accessed by provider-led employers, the funding of this training, any reasons for not taking up training, and the extent to which providers were able to signpost employers to additional training opportunities. The findings are then compared to those reported for the new user broker-led employers in order to explore whether the two cohorts have different priorities and experiences in terms of the training accessed under Train to Gain.

Profile of training accessed through Train to Gain via the provider-led route

- 7.49 All provider-led employers interviewed for this evaluation had arranged some training through Train to Gain at a college or training provider. Nine in ten employers (91 per cent) arranged for some of their training to take place on-site while more than a third had some training delivered on-site (37 per cent). As a note, employers could have arranged some training on-site and other training off-site at the same time, which explains that the sum of both delivery formats adds up to more than 100%. This compares to the most common delivery formats of training arranged by broker-led employers – where three-fifths (60 per cent) of those who accessed training following a discussion with their skills broker arranged for the external training provider to deliver the training on-site and half (52 per cent) sent their staff off-site to the provider – however, the preference for on-site training is significantly more pronounced among provider-led employers.
- 7.50 Exploring the level of training accessed by provider-led employers, more than four in five employers (84 per cent) arranged for some of their staff to be trained at Level 2 or above, in most cases specifically at Level 2 (72 per cent) or Level 3 (45 per cent), as Figure 18 shows. A third (37 per cent) had accessed training designed to lead to a Skills for Life qualification. Provider-led employers were significantly more likely to access training designed to lead to a qualification at all levels compared to broker-led employers, particularly at Level 2 where the difference between the two cohorts is most pronounced (72 per cent of provider-led employers vs. 51 per cent of broker-led employers who trained).

Figure 18: The proportion of provider-led employers accessing training at different levels



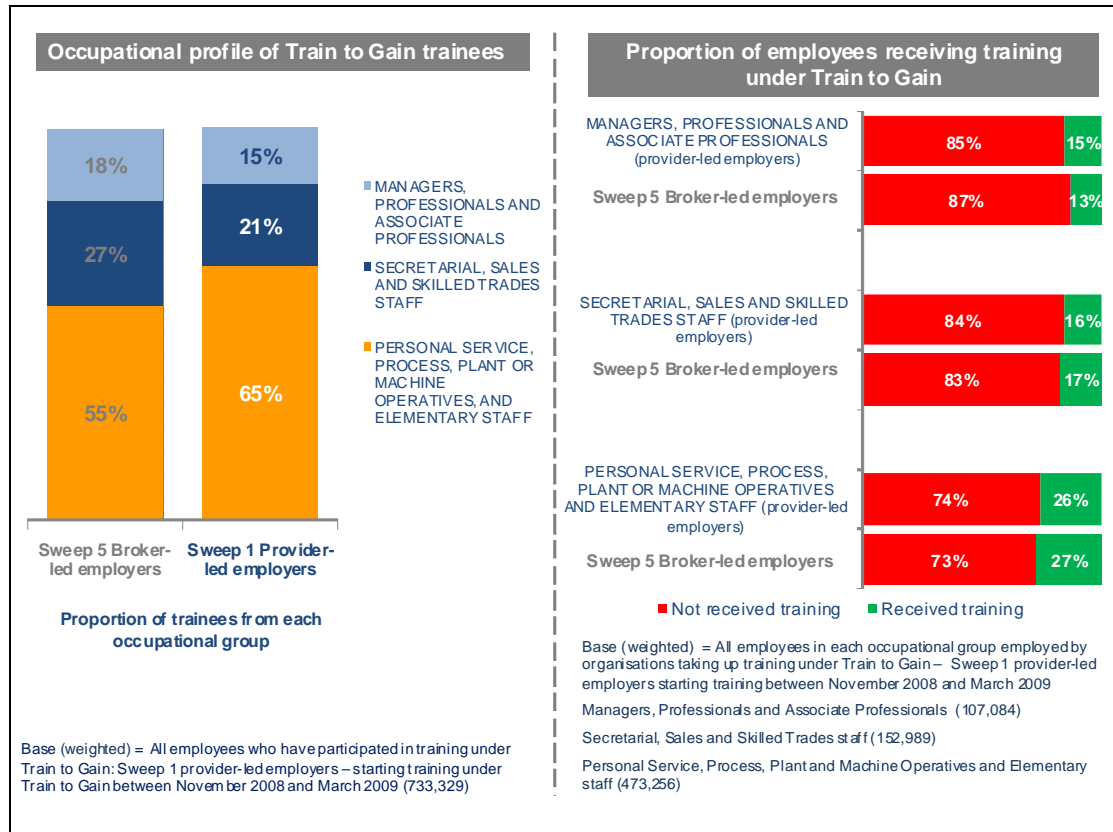
7.51 Considering the type of training accessed by provider-led employers, one in seven (15 per cent) reported that some of their senior management staff have received some leadership and management training under Train to Gain. This is a significantly lower proportion than found among broker-led employers (18 per cent).

7.52 In addition to the delivery format, level and type of training undertaken, it is useful to consider the specific occupations for whom employers had arranged training. As Figure 23 shows, the largest proportion of trainees is made up from the lower end of the occupational spectrum. This is broadly in line with the results of the broker-led survey. There are, however, a number of significant differences between the two cohorts, including:

- Those employees receiving training were significantly more likely to be drawn from the Personal Service, Process, Plant and Machine Operatives, or Elementary occupations with employers who accessed Train to Gain via the provider-led route (65 per cent) than with employers who were previously in contact with a skills broker (55 per cent);
- Conversely, there was a smaller proportion of individuals working in the Secretarial, Sales or Skilled Trades occupations who received training with provider-led employers (21 per cent) than with broker-led employers (27 per cent);

- The proportion of staff working as Managers, Professionals and Associate Professionals receiving training was also smaller amongst provider-led employers (15 percent) compared with at broker-led employers (18 per cent).

Figure 19: The occupational profile of Train to Gain trainees – provider-led employers



7.53 Staff employed in the Personal Service, Process, Plant and Machine Operatives, or Elementary occupations were also the most likely to receive Train to Gain training, relative to the total employment in this occupational group. Over a quarter (26 per cent) of all individuals employed in Personal Service, Process, Plant and Machine Operatives, or Elementary occupations received training under Train to Gain, compared with 16 per cent of those employed in the Secretarial, Sales or Skilled Trades occupational group, and 15 per cent of Managers, Professionals and Associate Professionals. This pattern mirrors the results of the Sweep 5 broker-led employer survey.

Funding of training accessed through Train to Gain via the provider-led route

- 7.54 Table 15 examines the extent to which provider-led employers have accessed funding under Train to Gain. It shows that four in five (79 per cent) have arranged some training that was fully subsidised through Train to Gain. By comparison, employers who accessed Train to Gain training following a conversation with a skills broker were also most likely to receive fully subsidised training, but to a significantly lesser extent (54 per cent).
- 7.55 Consequently, provider-led employers were significantly less likely to access training that was partly subsidised than broker-led employers (16 per cent vs. 43 per cent) and also less likely to access wholly unsubsidised training (8 per cent vs. 13 per cent).
- 7.56 Overall, one in five provider-led employers (21 per cent) made some contribution to the training costs. This is significantly less than the proportion of broker-led employers who made at least some contribution to their training (51 per cent).

Table 15: The proportion of employers accessing subsidies for training - comparison of the provider-led and broker-led routes

	Sweep 1 provider-led survey	Sweep 5 new user broker-led survey
<i>Base: All employers taking up training through Train to Gain</i>	3,750	1,704
Fully subsidised training	79%	54%
Partly subsidised training – employer paid:	16%	43%
Nearly all of the costs	1%	2%
Most of the costs	1%	4%
Roughly half the costs	5%	17%
Less than half the costs	7%	20%
Don't know	2%	1%
Wholly unsubsidised training	8%	13%
Don't know	7%	3%

- 7.57 It is interesting to note that even though all provider-led employers had taken up training funded through Train to Gain, there were 8 per cent of provider-led employers who stated that some of the training they received was wholly unsubsidised; a further 7 per cent were unsure to what extent their training had been externally funded, compared to a significantly lower proportion found among broker-led employers (3 per cent). Those provider-led employers who did not know about the funding of their training were also less likely to be aware of Train to Gain (75 per cent) than the average (84 per cent). These trends appear to be related to the findings of the recent qualitative research, which found that awareness of funding under Train to Gain can be low among some provider-led employers in instances where employers are under the impression that the training they receive is “free” while in reality it is supported by

subsidies. This perception was observed among employers who tend to expect the training provider to “take care of everything” including the administration of funding for training.

- 7.58 One in ten (9 per cent) of the eligible provider-led employers (those with fewer than 50 staff) made a claim for a contribution to wage costs. Of those who made a claim almost two thirds (63 per cent) were successful, one in five (21 per cent) reported that they were still waiting for the outcome of their claim, and 5 per cent were unsuccessful. This compares to 7 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who made a claim, with just under half (47 per cent) of these successful at the time of the interview. The reason why fewer broker-led employers have been successful in claiming a contribution to wage cost is related to the fact that more were waiting to learn whether their claim has been successful (38 per cent compared to 21 per cent of provider-led employers).
- 7.59 Employers in both cohorts gave very similar responses as to why they did not make a claim to a contribution to wage costs. Two in five (42 per cent) employers interviewed in the provider-led survey were simply not aware of the offer, a fifth (21 per cent) felt that it was not necessary or not worth making a claim, and one in ten (9 per cent) felt it was not worth the effort for the amount that could be claimed.

Reasons for not taking up other training offered by provider

- 7.60 Even though all employers interviewed for the provider-led survey had undertaken some training through Train to Gain, one in ten (11 per cent) also decided against some other training opportunities offered by their college or training provider.
- 7.61 When asked – on a prompted basis – about the reasons why they decided not to proceed with that training, provider-led employers gave a variety of reasons. More than a quarter (27 per cent) said they did not go ahead with the suggested training because their staff would not have been eligible to receive subsidised training, and one in six (17 per cent) explained that the training would have required too much time from their staff.
- 7.62 These are essentially cost considerations which are related to the perception of one in eight employers (13 per cent) who felt that the training was too expensive, and to the fact that one in ten (10 per cent) of the provider-led employers were concerned about the economic climate and decided against the training.

Providers ability to cater for employers needs and signpost to other training opportunities

- 7.63 One of the key research objectives was to assess the extent to which training providers are giving impartial advice and are able to signpost employers to a range of training opportunities as part of the overall Train to Gain service. This is a key part of the remit of skills brokers who facilitate the analysis of skills requirements and help employers to source a range of appropriate training solutions. Looking at provider-led employers it was therefore important to explore the extent to which employers went through a similar process.
- 7.64 A minority of provider-led employers (15 per cent) reported having some training needs for which their training provider was unable to offer any solution. This was more likely to be the case among larger employers, where one in five (22 per cent) of companies employing over 250 staff reported unmet training needs compared with just one in ten (9 per cent) of companies with less than ten staff. Those employers whose training provider was unable to find solutions to their training needs reported a variety of unresolved issues, as Table 16 shows. The inability to provide access to the required qualifications was mentioned by half (51 per cent) of employers. Further unmet training requirements included issues such as funding for training, which was reported by one in seven employers (15 per cent), access to industry or job specific training (14 per cent), training up-to-date with industrial legislation (13 per cent) and Leadership and Management courses (12 per cent).

Table 16: Training requirements unmet by providers - provider-led employers

<i>Base: Provider-led employers with training needs where provider was unable to offer solutions</i>	538
	%
Access to qualifications	51
Funding for training	15
Industry or job specific training	14
Keeping up with the change of industrial legislation	13
Leadership and Management courses	12
Good service from training provider	5
Funding for flexible, bite-size or short courses	4
Other	3
Don't know	1

- 7.65 Two in five of the provider-led employers (37 per cent) who were left with unmet training needs reported that their training provider was able to suggest where the employer could get further advice on these issues or to access the required training, which indicates that the provider was able to signpost employers to elsewhere for further information and advice. However, three in five (60 per cent) of those employers with unmet requirements stated that their provider was not able to suggest where they could get further advice. This group of employers could potentially have been better

served by a skills broker in terms of the provision of advice and guidance services within Train to Gain.

7.66 To summarise, the comparison of the two employer cohorts has shown a number of significant differences between the take up of training among provider-led employers compared with those broker-led employers who took up training after being in contact with a skills broker, including:

- Provider-led employers are more likely to take up training designed to lead to a qualification, particularly at Level 2 (72 per cent vs. 51 per cent of broker-led employers who took up training);
- they tend to arrange more training for lower level occupations (65 per cent of all trainees at provider-led employers are Personal service, Process , Plant, Machine operatives and Elementary staff compared with 55 per cent at broker-led employers who took up training); and
- they are more likely to access fully subsidised training (79 per cent compared with 54 per cent of broker-led employers who took up training).

8 The impact of the recession on engagement with Train to Gain and employers views on the New Flexibilities offer for SMEs

Key findings

- 8.1 Evidence from the broker-led evaluation shows that training levels are holding up under the recession, with more than two in five employers taking up training under Train to Gain at the last two sweeps of the survey (45 per cent at Sweep 5 and 42 per cent at Sweep 4). This is an encouraging indication of the positive role that Train to Gain skills brokers exert in encouraging employers to continue to arrange and invest in training given the wider context of other studies reporting a fall in training activity amongst UK employers.
- 8.2 However, the impact of the recession is evident among those employers who did not go ahead with the training discussed with their skills broker, who are now more likely to cite concerns over the economic climate as a reason for not undertaking this training (35 per cent at Sweep 5, up from 28 per cent at Sweep 4 and 6 per cent at Sweep 3).
- 8.3 While most broker-led employers say their attitude to training has not changed as a result of the recession, it is interesting to see that more say it has grown in importance (a third) than say it has become a lower business priority (one in ten).
- 8.4 Although, on balance, training expenditure among the vast majority of broker-led employers has remained stable, there has been a significant increase in employers who have had to cut their expenditure in the short term (11 per cent from 8 per cent in Sweep 4), and an increase in those who attribute their reduced training expenditure to the recession (10 per cent of all employers at Sweep 5 vs. 6 per cent at Sweep 4). Employers who had reduced their training expenditure due to the recession were less likely to engage with Train to Gain training.
- 8.5 Half of broker-led employers expect training expenditure in the future to remain relatively stable, while two fifths expect it to increase and 6 per cent anticipate a decrease.
- 8.6 The availability of financial support under Train to Gain – including fully or partly subsidised training at Level 2 and Level 3 and contributions to wage costs – continues to attract employers and as seen elsewhere in this report has become increasingly important for employers in these recessionary times. Half of those employers who had applied for a contribution to wage costs said that this decision was influenced by the recession, rising to 84 per cent among those where training spend had already reduced because of the recession.

- 8.7 A quarter of broker-led employers were aware of the new, flexible 'bite sized' training offer for SMEs. Most eligible employers believe it to be a good offer (82 per cent) and two thirds (63 per cent) have taken it up or would consider taking it up.
- 8.8 The findings of the third longitudinal survey of broker-led employers corroborate these trends. While overall training activity was found to hold up in the long term, the survey shows that the recession has had a moderate effect on training expenditure and has made employers more likely in the long term to consider making use of the offer of a contribution for wage costs and the new flexible 'bite sized' training offer for SMEs.
- 8.9 The findings from the provider-led survey show that employers accessing Train to Gain via a college or training provider are less likely than broker-led employers to report a reduced training expenditure due to the recession. Financial support in terms of subsidised Level 2 and Level 3 training is a more important factor for attracting provider-led employers into Train to Gain than it is for broker-led employers, while the offer of a contribution of wage costs appears to be equally important to both groups. More than half (55 per cent) of the provider-led employers have or would consider taking up the new 'bite-sized' learning offer under Train to Gain.

Introduction

- 8.10 Most of the existing, early evidence on the impact of the economic recession clearly shows that employers in the UK have had to modify their training and development practices as a result of the recession (for a global perspective on the UK's challenges and policy responses in the current downturn see Bewick, T., 2009). There is, however, mixed evidence to date as to the precise effects of the recession on the extent and the nature of training activities, and on training expenditure. Many of the recent studies show that overall training activity is decreasing in the recession with many employers cutting down on any 'discretionary' training as part of their cost cutting measures, while maintaining only the necessary minimum of mandatory training, for example statutory health and safety training (see Alliance SSC, 2009). This was also the general finding of a recent qualitative employer evaluation of Train to Gain.
- 8.11 Other studies, however, argue that UK companies tend to react in a differential way to the dynamic and complex challenges posed by the recession, for example depending on the industry sector and type of company (see for example UKCES, 2009). Some companies are maintaining their overall training expenditure, but are now directing their training budgets more carefully towards specific training needs, qualifications or levels of training, and occupations trained (see CBI, 2009). There are also indications that some companies may be investing more in training out of strategic and long-term considerations, which are designed to develop new skills in

order to improve competitiveness and prepare businesses for the eventual economic upturn (CIPD, 2009).

8.12 This chapter considers the impact of the recession on employer's engagement with Train to Gain, incorporating the findings from Sweep 5 of the broker-led evaluation, the third broker-led longitudinal survey, and the new provider-led survey. It looks at changes in the take-up of and expenditure on training that can be directly attributed to the effects of the recession, and reports on the importance of subsidised training and other support for employers to become involved with Train to Gain. The chapter also explores how employers view the new, flexible offer for small and medium sized enterprises that the LSC introduced in January 2009 in order to adapt the service to the changing economic environment.

The impact of the recession on employer views on training as a business priority

8.13 Sweep 5 of the study, involving interviews with employers using the broker service for the first time, took place between June and August 2009 when the global economic recession was particularly severe. However, results show that employers who were involved with Train to Gain value the strategic importance of training during the economic downturn. More than half (57 per cent) felt that the recession had no impact on their views about training, while a third (34 per cent) said that training has become more important as a business priority. Only 9 per cent reported training to be less important as result of the recession.

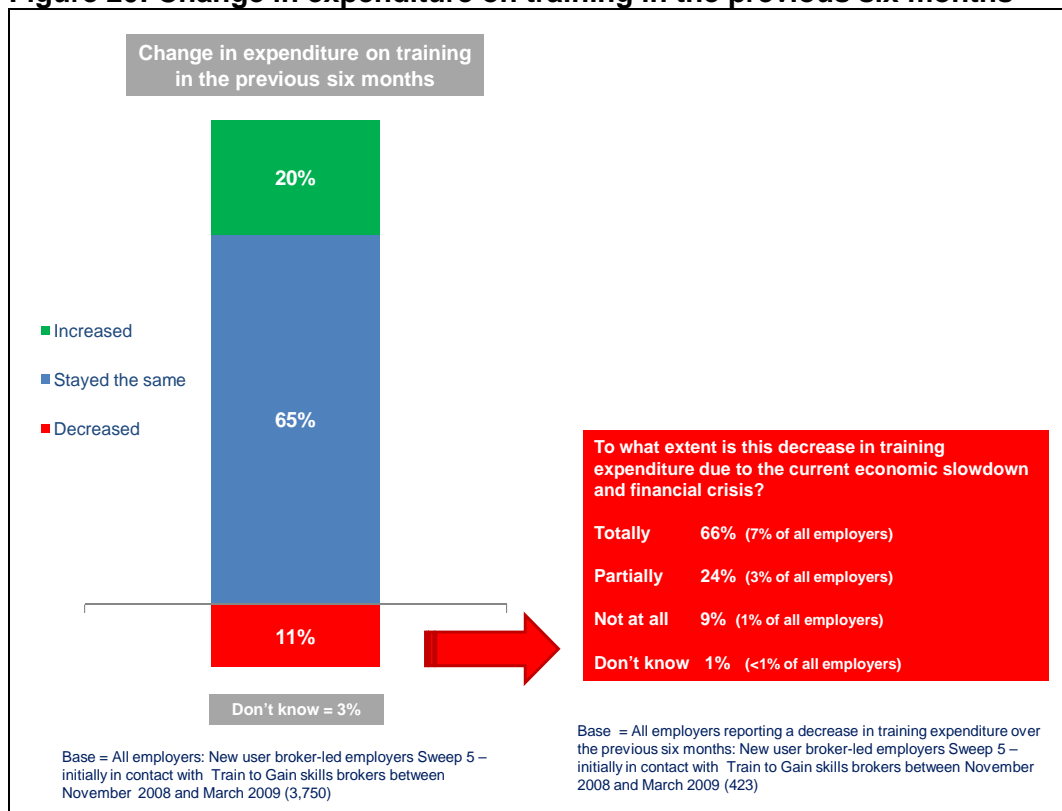
8.14 The relative prioritisation of training in the recession varied by the extent to which employers had engaged with Train to Gain. Those employers who had taken up training as a result of the skills broker intervention were significantly more likely to consider training as a more important business priority in the recession (40 per cent) than those who did not take up training (29 per cent). This suggests that the initial skills broker intervention – in addition to driving up take up of training under Train to Gain in the short term – can have a positive effect on employers' more general training priorities or 'training culture' within their overall business strategyⁱⁱ. These findings may also suggest that the recent Train to Gain promotional campaigns have been effective in persuading employers about the benefits of training in order to improve competitiveness and prepare for the economic upturn.

The impact of the recession on recent training expenditure

8.15 The results of Sweep 5 of the broker-led employer evaluation indicate that the recession has had a more moderate negative effect on training expenditure among employers engaged with Train to Gain than may have been expected from other survey evidence among UK businesses as a whole. Figure 20 shows how employers' expenditure has changed over the six months preceding the interview (that is, roughly between January and June 2009)ⁱⁱⁱ.

8.16 One in five (20 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers reported that their training expenditure had increased over the previous six months, while for two thirds (65 per cent) expenditure had remained the same. The proportion of Sweep 4 broker-led employers reporting an increase in training expenditure over the previous 6 months was significantly higher (27 per cent), this likely to reflect that these employers were discussing an earlier period (approximately between July 2008 to December 2008) when the full effect of the recession was still unfolding. Nevertheless, the results of Sweep 5 indicate that a clear majority of Train to Gain employers continue to invest in their training and development activities despite the recession.

Figure 20: Change in expenditure on training in the previous six months



8.17 One in nine (11 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers reported a decrease in training expenditure over the six months prior to the survey – significantly higher than at Sweep 4 where 8 per cent of employers reported a decrease in training spend. Most Sweep 5 employers attributed this decrease either totally (66 per cent) or partially (24 per cent) to the effects of the economic downturn. Hence overall, one in ten (10 per cent) of all employers reduced their training expenditure at least partly as a result of the recession^{iv}. Again, these figures are significantly higher than at Sweep 4 when the comparative figure was 6 per cent.

8.18 Employers who indicated at Sweep 4 that they anticipated a decrease in their training expenditure due to the recession were followed-up in a recent qualitative research project conducted for the LSC in May and June 2009. The overall findings

of this qualitative project presented a relatively bleak picture of training expenditure among these employers. Keeping in mind the small scale nature of this qualitative research, which limits the extent to which results can be generalised, the study found extensive evidence of training budgets coming under severe pressure, and many employers who took part in the research reported that they were only undertaking training for which they had already secured funding and had cancelled or postponed all other training.

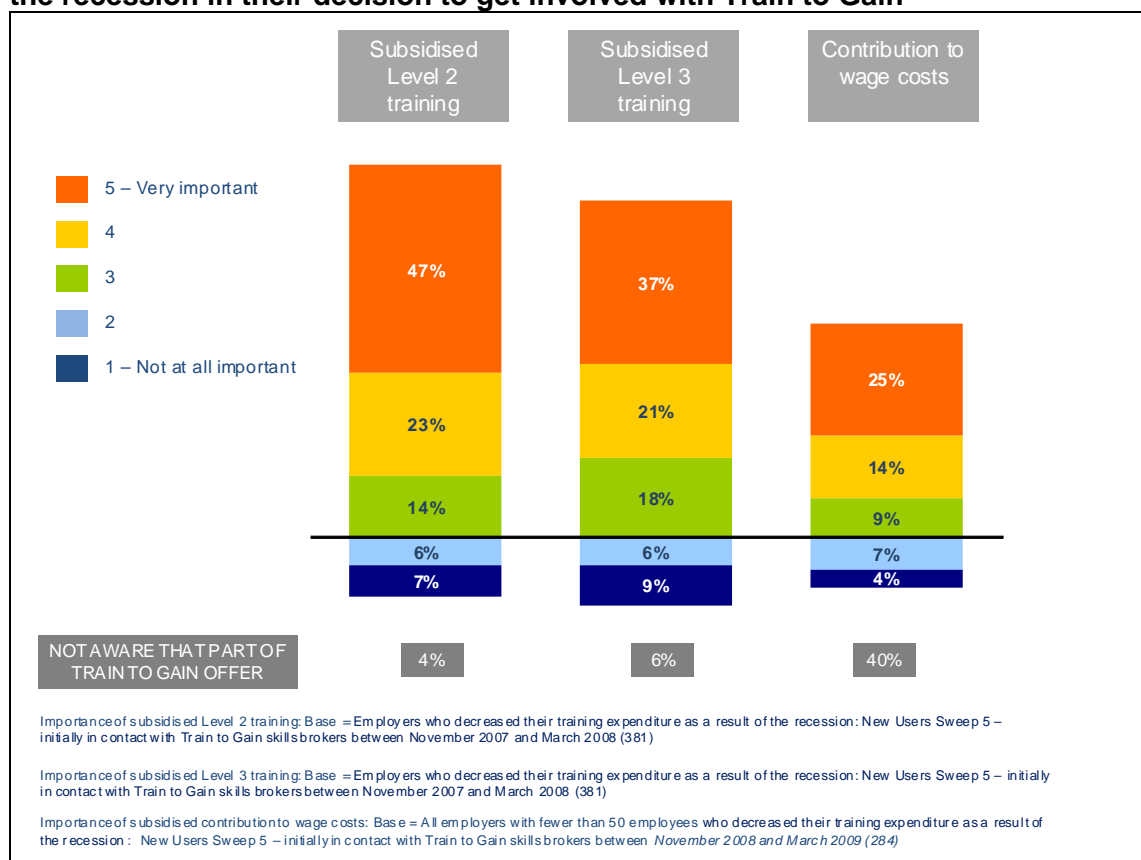
- 8.19 Employers in the Primary, utilities and manufacturing and in the Financial and business services sectors were significantly more likely than average to report a decrease in training expenditure as a result of the downturn (15 per cent and 13 per cent respectively) and those in the Public administration, education, and health sector significantly less likely (7 per cent)^v. By company size, the recession has had more of an impact on large companies, with significantly more businesses employing over 250 staff and between 50 and 249 staff reporting a decrease in training expenditure due to the recession than the average (24 per cent and 15 per cent respectively).
- 8.20 Employers who reported a decrease in training expenditure as a result of the recession in the previous six months prior to the interview were significantly less likely to have taken up training under Train to Gain (35 per cent) than all new user broker-led employers (45 per cent). Where they had not taken up the training opportunities discussed with their skills broker, they were much more likely to agree strongly that this was a result of their concerns about the economic climate (63 per cent, compared with 27 per cent of employers overall who did not take up training). This indicates that employers who are scaling back on training expenditure are less likely to engage with Train to Gain training. Still, a third of those employers (35 per cent) who decreased their training expenditure due to the recession have nevertheless accessed some Train to Gain training. Similarly, it should be remembered that those employers who report a negative impact on training expenditure are only a small minority of all the Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers.

The importance of financial support through Train to Gain in the recession

- 8.21 Throughout this evaluation there is consistent evidence that employers place a high value on the funding opportunities available under Train to Gain and that, conversely, the lack of funding or the fact that training was felt to be too expensive are frequently mentioned reasons for not going ahead with the training suggested by skills brokers. Predictably the importance of funding is particularly key for those who have had to cut back training spend as a result of the recession.
- 8.22 Figure 21 shows results on the importance of the availability of partly or fully subsidised training – specifically at Level 2 and Level 3 – and the offer of a contribution to wage costs for employers to become involved with Train to Gain.

Half (47 per cent) of those employers whose training expenditure has been negatively affected by the recession felt that the prospect of accessing subsidies for Level 2 training was very important for their involvement with Train to Gain and two fifths (37 per cent) felt the same with regards Level 3 training. Although these figures are not significantly higher than the importance attributed to subsidies for Level 2 (43 per cent) and Level 3 (34 per cent) training reported for the entire broker-led cohort (see Chapter 5) there is fairly strong evidence throughout the report that stresses the importance of funding during these recessionary times, for example through the perceived increased importance of the ability of the skills broker to identify financial support and through dissatisfaction being more attributable to the lack of anticipated or expected funding.

Figure 21: Importance of financial support for employers negatively affected by the recession in their decision to get involved with Train to Gain



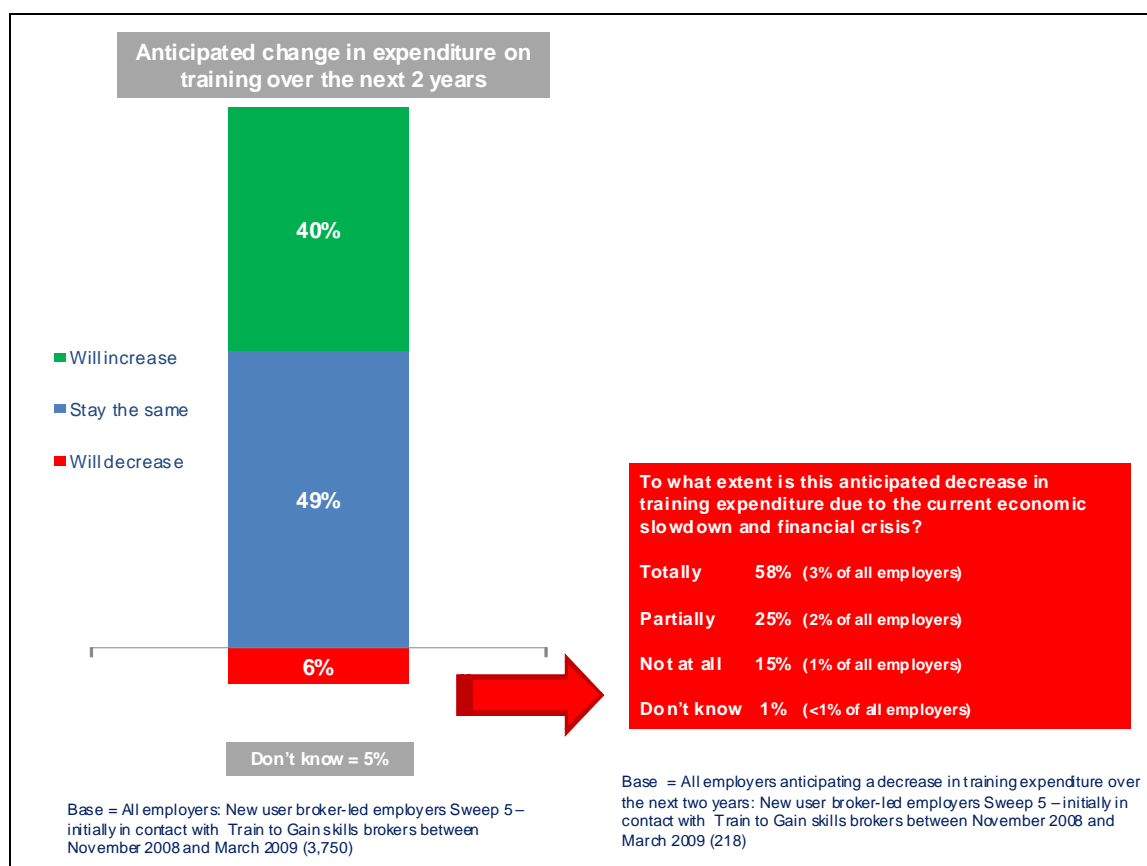
8.23 Among those aware that it was part of Train to Gain offer, a contribution to wages costs was most often rated as a very important reason for involvement with Train to Gain and those employers who had reduced their training spend as a result of the recession were significantly more likely to rate this as a very important factor (25 per cent) compared with all broker-led employers (19 per cent).

8.24 Among those employers who applied for a contribution to wage costs (7 per cent of all eligible employers) almost half (49 per cent) said that their decision to apply was influenced by the recession either 'to some extent' or 'a great deal'. Amongst employers where training budgets had to be reduced as a result of the recession

there was a comparable level of take up (8 per cent) but a significantly higher proportion stating that the recession had influenced their decision to apply (84 per cent).

- 8.25 These findings confirm the insights emerging from the qualitative employer research, where a majority of employers whose staff had received recent training through Train to Gain reported that these employees would have been unlikely to have received the training if Train to Gain had not been available. One of the consequences of the recession, the study concluded, was an increase in the perceived importance of Train to Gain for employers to continue to invest in staff development.
- 8.26 Taking the economic recession into account, employers were asked how their future training expenditure is expected to develop compared to their current spend. Figure 22 shows that half of all broker-led employers (49 per cent) anticipated their future levels of training expenditure to remain the same in the coming 2 years^{vi}, and two-fifths (40 per cent) expected their training expenditure to increase. These results are broadly in line with those of Sweep 4, when 43 per cent anticipated no change and 41 per cent expected an increase in training expenditure. The findings are clearly encouraging and show that, on balance, employers involved with Train to Gain continue to invest in staff development in spite of the recession.
- 8.27 Only 6 per cent of employers in Sweep 5 (in line with the 7 per cent reported at Sweep 4) anticipated a decrease in training expenditure in the coming two years, and over four-fifths of these employers who anticipated a decrease in their training expenditure (83 per cent, equivalent to 5 per cent of all employers) attributed this anticipated decrease either totally or partially to the effects of the economic downturn.
- 8.28 Larger employers were more likely to expect a decrease in their training expenditure over the coming two years as a result of the recession, with 13 per cent of those employing more than 250 staff anticipating a decrease compared with 3 per cent of those with fewer than five staff.

Figure 22: Expected change in future expenditure on training in the coming two years



Awareness of the new flexibilities in the Train to Gain offer for SMEs

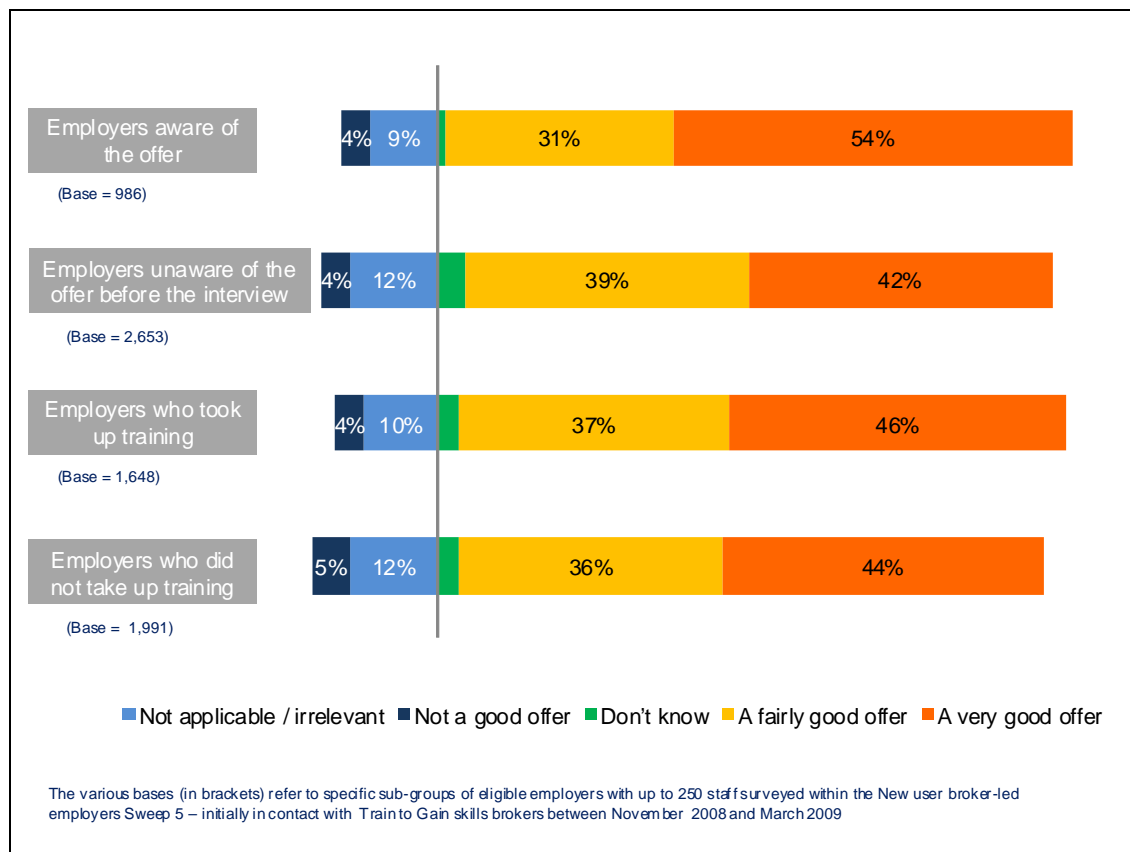
- 8.29 In order to make it easier for SMEs to access training funded by Train to Gain, the LSC introduced a series of changes, or 'new flexibilities', to the service in January 2009. One of the main changes allows SMEs to access free or part-funded training in 'bite-sized chunks' rather than full NVQ qualifications – that is, small units or modules of qualifications in subjects known to be important to SMEs, such as business improvement, team-working, customer service, and risk management.
- 8.30 Overall, a quarter (27 per cent) of all broker-led employers interviewed between June and August 2009 for Sweep 5 of the evaluation were aware of the new, flexible offer for SMEs under Train to Gain. Larger companies employing 50 to 249 staff were more likely to be aware of the new flexible offer (38 per cent) than small employers with fewer than five staff (20 per cent). However, almost three quarters (72 per cent) of eligible employers were not aware of the new offer for SMEs.
- 8.31 The role of skills brokers in promoting the new offer for SMEs has been crucial: half of those employers who were aware of the offer reported learning about it while they were in contact with their skills broker (52 per cent) and a further 8 per

cent reported having received leaflets or other marketing material about it from their skills broker. One in ten (10 per cent) had heard about the offer from a college or a training provider. The remainder heard about the new offer for SMEs from a variety of sources including the LSC website, the Train to Gain website, through Business Link, at a conference or through a colleague.

Employer views and take-up of the new flexibilities in the Train to Gain offer for SMEs

8.32 Once the offer was explained to eligible employers, the vast majority thought that the new 'bite sized' learning package for SMEs was a good offer (82 per cent), with almost half (45 per cent) describing it as a very good offer. One in nine (11 per cent) thought the offer was not applicable or not relevant to their business. Figure 27 shows that differences by level of prior awareness of the offer and by whether or not employers took up training under Train to Gain were relatively slight.

Figure 23: Employer views of the new 'bite sized' learning package



8.33 The new offer for 'bite-sized' training for SMEs was particularly well received among:

- Employers in the Hotels and Restaurants sector (86 per cent found it a good offer for their business).
- Those who had reduced training expenditure as a result of the recession (83 per cent).

- Those for whom training has become a more important business priority as a result of the recession (86 per cent).
- 8.34 Those employers who were aware of the SME offer were asked to rate its importance for deciding to become involved with Train to Gain. Overall, a third of the eligible employers (31 per cent) said it was a very important element in their decision to become involved, higher among smaller companies with fewer than five staff (38 per cent) and those employing five to nine staff (39 per cent).
- 8.35 One in ten (10 per cent) eligible employers who were aware of the new flexibility offer had arranged some training that was funded as part of the new 'bite sized' learning under Train to Gain. In addition, a high proportion of eligible employers who were not aware of the offer stated that they would consider taking it up (84 per cent). Taken together, almost two thirds (63 per cent) of eligible employers have or would consider taking up the new offer.
- 8.36 Perhaps surprisingly, employers who did not take up training under Train to Gain due to concerns over the economic climate were no more likely to take up or consider taking up the new offer as were those who have decreased their training expenditure due to the recession.

The impact of the recession on employers' engagement with Train to Gain in the long term

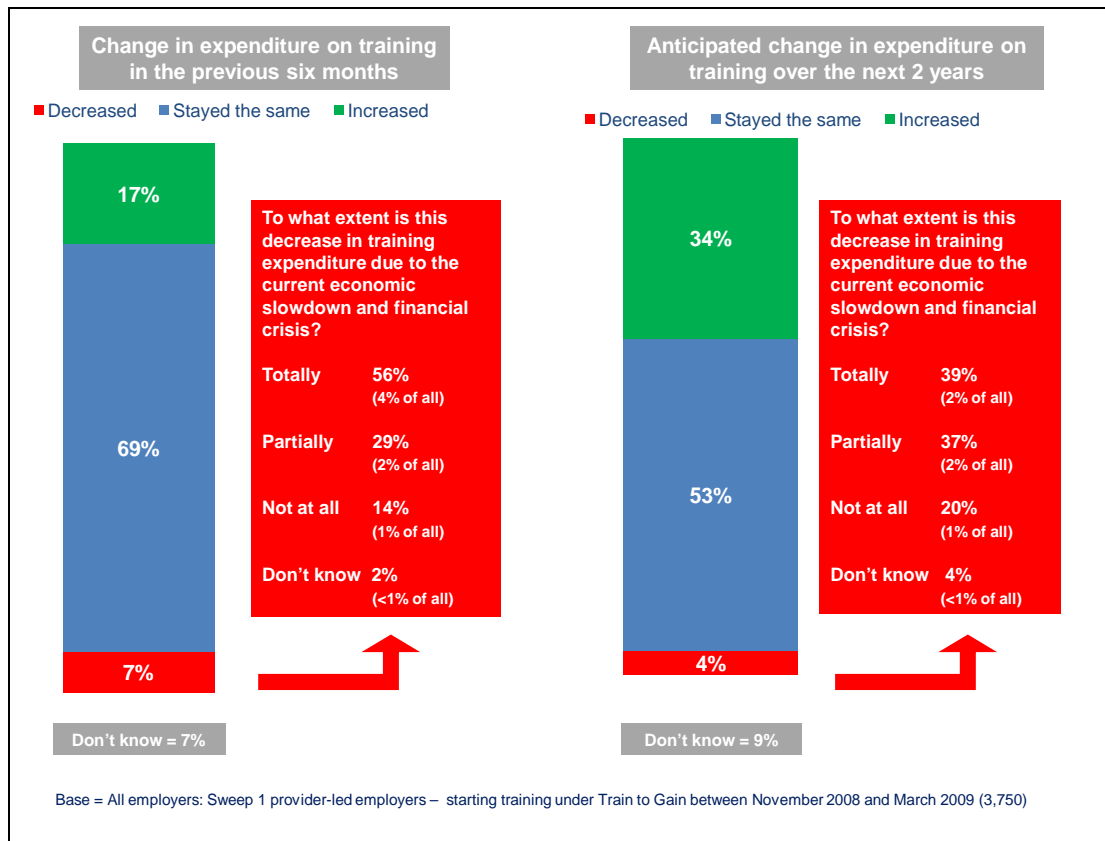
- 8.37 The evidence from the latest broker-led longitudinal survey conducted between June and August 2009 (which followed up employers initially engaged by skills brokers in November 2007 and April 2008) confirms many of the trends discussed so far. One of the impacts of the recession has been that, on balance, employers engaged with Train to Gain tend to regard training as a higher business priority. Mirroring findings from the Sweep 1 broker-led survey, a third (34 per cent) of employers (re)contacted in the longitudinal survey reported that training had become a more important priority for the business as a result of the recession, more than half (54 per cent) stated that the recession has made no difference to their views about training as a business priority, and one in nine (11 per cent) felt that the recession has made training less important.
- 8.38 Overall take-up of training opportunities suggested by skills brokers under Train to Gain has been increasing over the long term, as Chapter 8 has shown. However, the most common reason mentioned by employers for not having taken up training when recontacted for the third longitudinal survey were concerns over the current economic climate (56 per cent).
- 8.39 Looking at changes in training expenditure over time shows that most employers resurveyed a second time reported either a stable expenditure (64 per cent) or an increase (22 per cent) during the six months prior to the interview.

- 8.40 Those employers on the longitudinal survey who had had to decrease their training expenditure in the previous six months due to the recession were significantly less likely to take up additional training through Train to Gain in the long term (48 per cent) than all employers re-contacted for the longitudinal survey (59 per cent).
- 8.41 In line with the findings of Sweep 5 of the broker-led evaluation, the majority of employers resurveyed for the longitudinal survey expect their training expenditure to remain stable (51 per cent) or to increase (39 per cent) over the coming two years. Just 6 per cent anticipate a decrease in training expenditure – this was mostly attributed to the recession and less than half of these (46 per cent) expect to engage with Train to Gain in the next 12 months.
- 8.42 Very similar to findings among Sweep 5 broker-led employers, a quarter (26 per cent) of the eligible broker-led employers interviewed for the third longitudinal survey were aware of the new, flexible learning offer for SMEs available under Train to Gain, and around four fifths found the new ‘bite-sized’ learning package a ‘fairly good’ or ‘very good’ offer (82 per cent).

Comparison of the impact of the recession on employers accessing Train to Gain via the broker-led and the provider-led route

- 8.43 This section explores the impact of the recession and the role of Train to Gain amongst employers who accessed Train to Gain via a college or training provider compared with employers who were initially engaged by a Train to Gain skills broker.
- 8.44 Half of the provider-led employers felt that the recession has had no impact on their views about the importance of training for their business (53 per cent, comparable to 57 per cent of broker-led employers). However, provider-led employers were significantly more likely to state that training has become more important for their business during the recession (41 per cent) than broker-led employers (34 per cent).
- 8.45 At the same time, provider-led employers were far less likely to cite concerns about the economic climate as a reason for not going ahead with the training than broker-led employers (10 per cent and 36 per cent respectively).
- 8.46 Figure 24 below shows how provider-led employers’ expenditure has changed in the 6 months preceding the interview and how it is anticipated to change over the next two years. It also shows to what extent any decrease is attributable to the recession.

Figure 24: Change in training expenditure in the previous six months and in the coming two years – Sweep 1 provider-led employers



- 8.47 The picture is similar to that described earlier with regards broker-led employers although a lower proportion of provider led employers report a decrease in expenditure due to the recession both in terms of previous and planned expenditure.
- 8.48 The availability of financial support is an important factor in stimulating demand for training among provider-led employers and persuading them to become involved with Train to Gain. In fact, the evidence shows that provider-led employers are more likely to state that fully or partly subsidised training at Level 2 (56 per cent) and at Level 3 (47 per cent) was 'very important' in their decision to become involved with Train to Gain compared with those Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers who took up training following a discussion with their skills broker (53 per cent and 41 per cent respectively).
- 8.49 Levels of awareness and the appeal of a contribution to wage costs among eligible provider-led mirrors that of broker-led employers. Over two fifths of provider-led employers (44 per cent) were unaware of this offer compared to 46 per cent of broker-led employers while one in five (19 per cent) of both groups felt this offer to be very important in their decision to become involved with Train to Gain. Among those provider-led employers who had had to reduce their training spend due to

the recession, the offer of a contribution to wage costs was an even stronger attraction, with 24 per cent saying this offer was very important.

8.50 The new 'bite-sized' learning offer for SMEs was well received by eligible provider-led employers. A quarter (26 per cent) were aware of the offer (compared to 27 per cent among broker-led employers who took up some training).

8.51 For a third (36 per cent) of these provider-led employers, the new offer for SMEs was a very important element in their decision to become involved with Train to Gain and, once the offer was explained to eligible employers, four in five (82 per cent) thought it to be a good offer for their business. This is broadly in line with the findings of Sweep 5 of the new user broker-led employers, where a third (31 per cent) of those employers who trained under Train to Gain thought that the new offer was very important for their decision to become involved with Train to Gain and four in five (83 per cent) felt that this was a very good or a fairly good offer.

8.52 In total, over half (55 per cent) of the provider-led employers have taken up or would consider taking up the new 'bite-sized' offer for SMEs, which again is higher for those employers who had to decrease their training expenditure during the recession (63 per cent). While reaction to the offer is therefore positive for a majority of provider-led employers, it is lower than the 65 per cent of broker-led employers who had taken up or who would consider taking up the offer.

9 The additional impact and value of Train to Gain in influencing employer training activity

Key findings

- 9.1 This section looks at the impact of Train to Gain on the volume, scope and quality of the training provision being accessed by employers. The key focus has been on measuring the value of the service in terms of encouraging and enabling employers to undertake **additional** training, over and above that which could have or would have taken place otherwise.
- 9.2 For those employers in contact with the skills brokerage service, a basic measure of the impact of the service is the proportion of employers who reported that their contact with the Train to Gain skills broker had led directly to them making a commitment to staff undertaking a new course of training. Over three fifths (63 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers had committed to training by the time of survey, two to eight months after the initial contact with the skills broker.
- 9.3 One third (34 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had committed to training through Train to Gain had had some staff involved with formal, vocational qualifications independent of Train to Gain previously, and one fifth of these committed employers (18 per cent) said that it was 'very likely' that they would have arranged **similar** training for staff in any case, without the involvement of Train to Gain. However, in the majority of cases where these employers have taken up training through Train to Gain, they were able to train more staff, a greater range of staff or access higher quality or higher level training than they would have done otherwise.
- 9.4 Indeed, amongst all Sweep 5 broker-led employers committed to training, the associated level of quantitative or qualitative additionality stands at 76 per cent. The evidence from the Longitudinal Survey suggests that total additionality is likely to increase in the long term with the move from scheduled training to actual enrolment and with employers taking up further training opportunities.
- 9.5 In terms of the level of additionality of Level 2 training amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers, of the c.45,400 employees participating in Train to Gain Level 2 training by the time of survey, only around one in eight (12 per cent - c. 5,500) would have been likely to take this qualification without Train to Gain, according to their employer.
- 9.6 However, total additionality has continued to fall in Sweep 5. As highlighted throughout this report, the importance employers place on financial support for training has increased in the recession, and this may be contributing to the proportion of employers deciding to 'move planned training provision over' to Train to Gain in order to benefit from financial support.

- 9.7 Estimates of the total additional value of Train to Gain training for provider-led employers and the comparable group of Sweep 5 broker-led employers (those taking up training through Train to Gain) are very similar (95 per cent vs. 93 per cent). Provider-led employers show a greater incidence of pure additionality (40 per cent vs. 29 per cent). However, Sweep 1 provider-led employers are more likely to say that they could have arranged training at Level 2 without the intervention of Train to Gain; provider-led employers report that as many as a third (33 per cent) of employees who undertook a Level 2 course through Train to Gain would have undertaken this qualification in any case (compared with a figure of 12 per cent for the Sweep 5 broker-led cohort).

Using the Employer Evaluation data to assess ‘additionality’

- 9.8 The Employer Evaluation was originally designed to assess the performance of the Train to Gain **skills brokerage service**. The survey was designed to assess the impact of the skills brokerage service on the volume, scope and quality of the training provision being accessed by employers, and the associated impact on their business or organisation. Throughout the evaluation, the key focus has been on measuring the value of government investment in the skills brokerage service, in terms of encouraging and enabling employers to undertake additional training, over and above that which could have or would have taken place otherwise. As discussed in previous chapters, the model was that skills brokers would achieve this by promoting the case for training, providing information on relevant training opportunities and any financial support that the employer may be entitled to in order to help them to train.
- 9.9 Throughout the evaluation, the overall proportion of employers making any changes to their training activity as a result of contact with the skills brokerage service has been a key measure of performance, as has the proportion of employers who report that they would not have taken up the same level, volume or quality of training without the influence of the service. The majority of the findings on ‘additionality’ presented in this chapter are concerned with the impact of the skills brokerage service on the training activity of the Sweep 5 broker-led employers.
- 9.10 Recently, there has been an increasing focus in policy discussions on assessing the return on investment of **financial support** to employers through Train to Gain, rather than assessing the performance of the skills brokerage service in boosting training activity. There has been interest in measuring the net impact of subsidies for training delivered through Train to Gain in terms of employer training activity, organisational performance and the economy as a whole. Working out the additional impact of the Train to Gain funding stream has become more important given the current restrictions on the overall budget and the intent to re-prioritise existing funds with Train to Gain to meet shifting priorities, as set out in the National Skills Strategy, published November 2009 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009, p.67). In the context of these current policy discussions, it is important to be clear about the limitations of using the Employer Evaluation data to answer questions about the overall impact of Train to Gain financial support to employers:

- Firstly, not all of the broker-led employers have taken up any training following the skills brokerage intervention, and where they have, not all have accessed financial support for this training through Train to Gain. Throughout the evaluation we have included assessments of the impact of training undertaken by employers that was prompted by the skills broker but paid for by the employer themselves or through subsidies obtained from other sources.
- Data from the Employer Evaluation on training activity and the funding of this activity is collected on an employer-establishment basis. In some cases, the employer has had staff undertake various training courses, sometimes with different funding arrangements for each. As employers are asked to describe the impact of this new training activity as a whole, it is not possible to delineate the impact per unit of training, per trainee or per unit of public investment.

9.11 As all of the **Sweep 1 provider-led employers** have accessed subsidised training through Train to Gain, the link between financial support and additionality is more direct than for Sweep 5 broker-led employers. However, as for the broker-led employers, a detailed assessment of the cost, subsidisation and impact of each unit of training arranged through Train to Gain by each employer is beyond the scope of this evaluation. Instead, this chapter looks at the level of additionality associated with the overall package of training accessed by each employer through Train to Gain.

The additional impact of the skills brokerage service on employer training activity

9.12 This section seeks to answer the question of whether engagement with the skills brokerage service is associated with an increase in the scope and quality of the training provision being accessed by employers. The most basic measure of the impact of the service is the proportion of employers who reported that their contact with the Train to Gain skills broker had led directly to them making a commitment to staff undertaking a new course of training. As described in Chapter 7, over three fifths (63 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers had committed to training by the time of survey, two to eight months after the initial contact with the skills broker. Whilst in the remaining cases it could be considered that the intervention had had no impact, there is the possibility that these employers may go on to access training after this point that could be attributed to the influence of the skills broker.

9.13 Amongst those employers who *did* commit to training as a result of the discussions they had with their skills broker, there is some tentative evidence that some of these employers might already have had a route into training, as well as the resources and expertise to arrange this. For example:

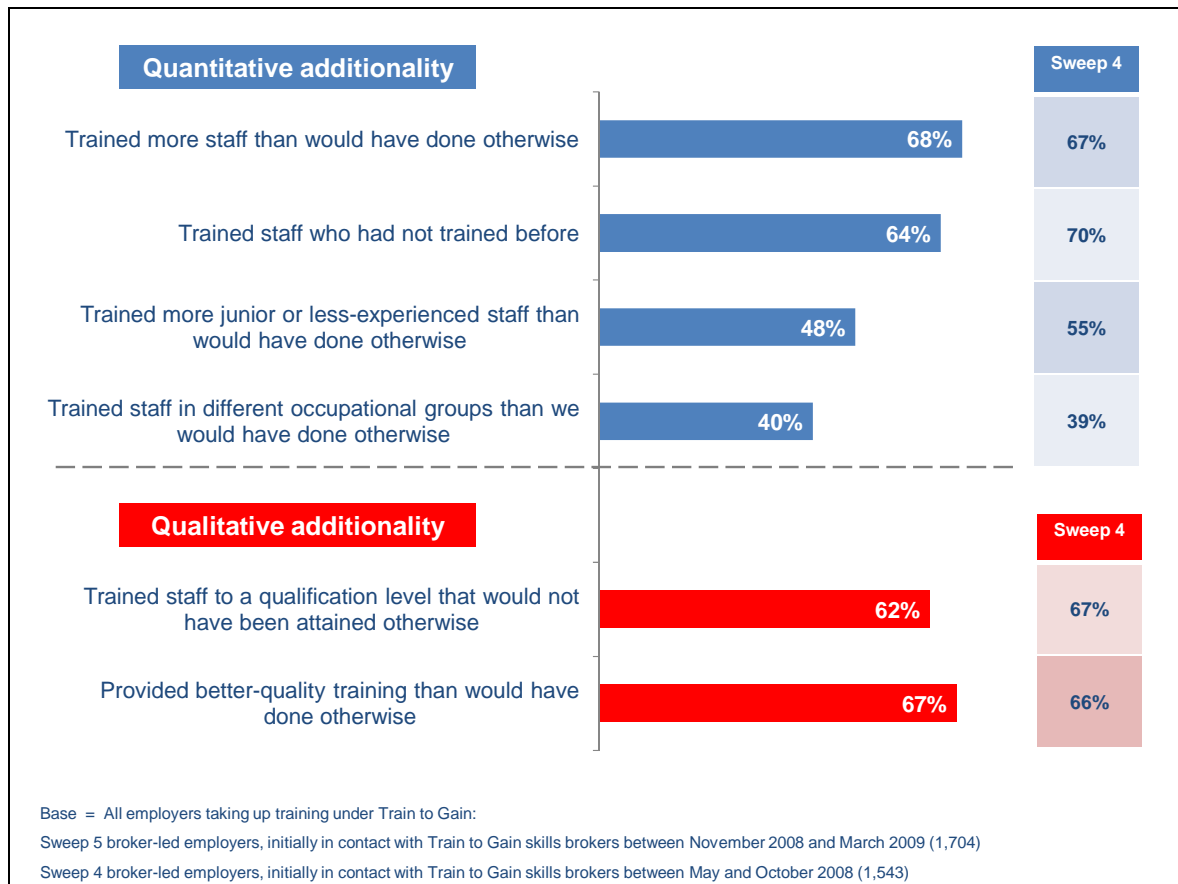
- One third (34 per cent) of these employers reported that they had had some staff involved in **vocational training leading to a formal qualification** in the 12 months prior to the interview, prior to or independent of any influence of the skills broker, and not funded through Train to Gain.

- One quarter of employers committing to training (25 per cent) had funded, arranged or supported one or more employees in achieving a NVQ Level 2, 3, 4 or 5 qualification or equivalent outside of Train to Gain in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- Half of employers receiving fully subsidised training (51 per cent) felt that they would have been very or fairly likely to go ahead with the same or similar training even if they had had to meet part of the costs themselves (although only 14 per cent said they would have been '*very likely*' to arrange the training without support, and this figure has fallen since Sweep 4 – 21 per cent).
- Approaching one fifth of those employers committing to training through Train to Gain (18 per cent) said that it was 'very likely' that they would have arranged *similar* training for staff in any case, without the involvement of Train to Gain.

9.14 However, it is possible for the groups of employers outlined in the bullets above to show additional value from training through Train to Gain. Whilst the training undertaken might have been *similar* to what had been arranged previously or that the employer say they could have been arranged in any case, in **the majority of cases where these employers have taken up training through Train to Gain, they have been able to train more staff, a greater range of staff or access higher quality or higher level training than they would have done otherwise.** For example, nearly nine in ten (88 per cent) of employers who had already arranged some formal, vocational training for staff outside of Train to Gain in the previous year and then went on to take up training through Train to Gain show report an additional effect on the quantity or quality of training they could access for staff.

9.15 Across *all* of the Sweep 5 broker-led employers who have gone on to take up training as a result of their contact with the skills brokerage service, substantial proportions report additional value. Figure 25 gives the proportions of these employers reporting that they have been able to train more staff than before, to train those not previously trained, to train more junior staff; or to train staff in additional occupational groups (quantitative additionality). There are also positive impacts on the quality or the qualification level of training that the employer is able to offer (qualitative additionality). There has been a statistically significant decrease since Sweep 4, however, on the proportion of committed employers reporting that they have been able to train staff who had not been trained before (64 per cent, compared to 70 per cent at Sweep 4), more junior or less experienced staff (48 per cent vs. 55 per cent) and to train staff to a qualification level that would not have been attained otherwise (62 per cent v. 67 per cent).

Figure 25: Quantitative and qualitative impact on training activity among Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up training through Train to Gain



9.16 The Train to Gain service provides funding support aimed at increasing attainment rates at Full Level 2, in line with performance targets set out in the LSC's 'Our Statement of Priorities: Better skills, Better jobs, Better lives' published in November 2007. In order to look in more detail at the additional impact of the Train to Gain service in enabling training at Level 2, the Sweep 5 broker-led employer survey included a new question for employers who had accessed training for staff designed to lead to a qualification at NVQ Level 2 or equivalent through Train to Gain (see Chapter 7 for more detail on these employers). These employers were asked for the number of these Level 2 trainees who would have undertaken this qualification without the involvement of Train to Gain. Of the c.45,400 employees participating in Train to Gain Level 2 training by the time of survey, only around one in eight (12 per cent - c. 5,500) would have been likely to take this qualification without Train to Gain, according to their employer. This suggests that through the skills brokerage service, Train to Gain is having a considerable impact in enabling employers to arrange training for their staff at Level 2 in cases where the employees would have been unlikely to benefit from up-skilling otherwise.

9.17 Table 17 provides a summary of the additional value associated with the Train to Gain skills brokerage service, based on all Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had committed to training at the time of survey. The table shows the proportion of

employers who have committed to training as a direct result of discussions with their skills broker and did not have any recent history of training (in the 12 months prior to the survey). These are considered to be examples of 'pure additionality'. The proportion of the new user broker-led cohort falling into this category has remained very constant across the five sweeps of the evaluation (at around three in ten committed employers).

Table 17: Summary of additionality effects associated with the Train to Gain skills brokerage service amongst employers committed to training through Train to Gain

Base:	Broker-led research sweep				
	Sweep 1	Sweep 2	Sweep 3	Sweep 4	Sweep 5
Additionality effect	%	%	%	%	%
Pure additionality	31	31	32	34	31
Quantitative additionality only	6	6	7	6	7
Qualitative additionality only	2	3	4	3	3
Both quantitative and qualitative additionality	33	42	38	35	36
Total additionality	73	82	80	78	76
Substitution / Deadweight	27	18	20	22	24

9.18 The estimates of additionality for Sweep 5 suggest that where employers have committed to training as a result of contact with the skills brokerage service, in three quarters of cases (76 per cent) this represents either their only training activity over the preceding year (summer 2008 to summer 2009) or a quantitative or qualitative addition to their training for staff.

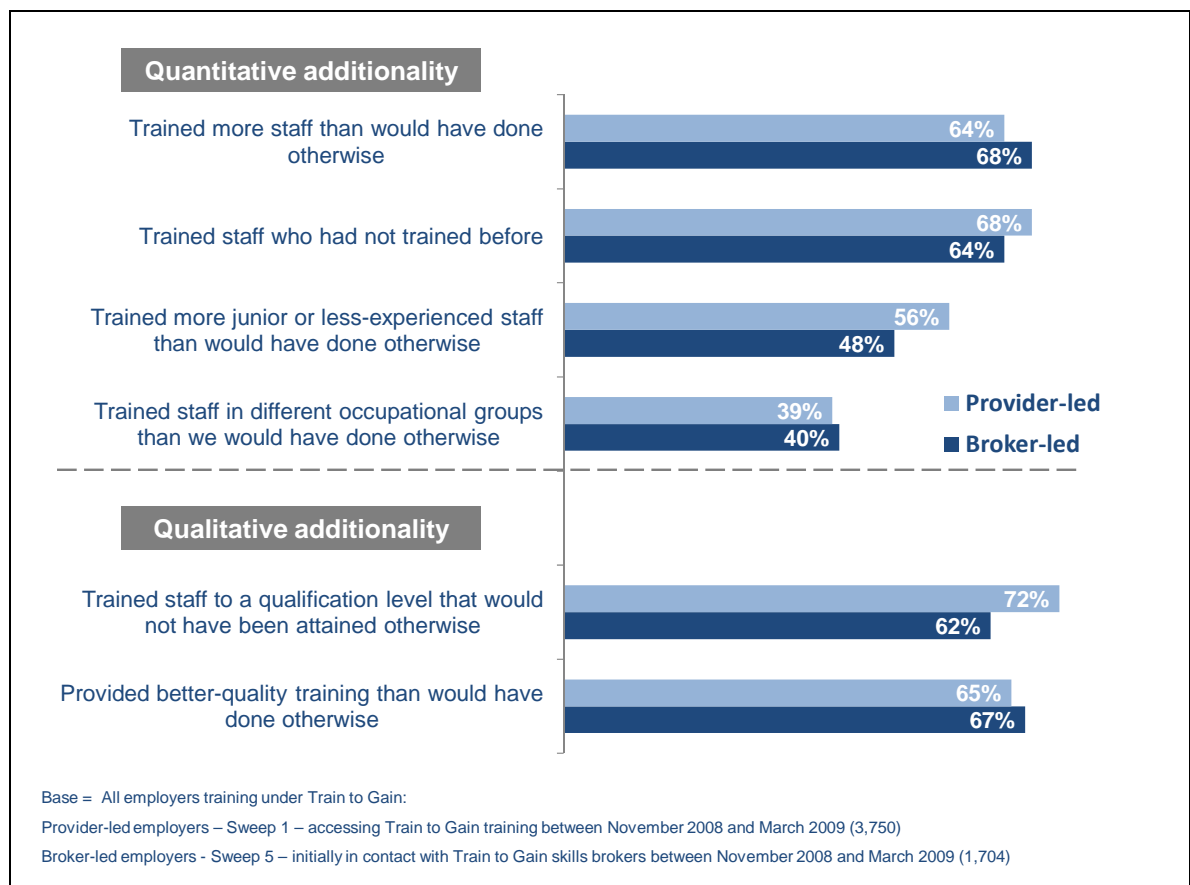
9.19 The remaining quarter (24 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers had committed to training through Train to Gain but this training did not at this point represent a step-up in terms of the quality, level or volume of training. From this we can infer that these employers may be using Train to Gain training as a substitute for training that they would have been able to offer in any case. However, it is important to note that the figures presented in Table 17 above represent a 'snap-shot' of additionality at the time of survey, two to eight months after the initial contact with the skills brokerage service. Within the group of employers committed to training at the point of survey, the move from scheduled training to actual enrolment and the possibility of employers taking up further training opportunities mean that there is the potential for additionality to increase over time. The evidence from Longitudinal Survey 3 shows that total additionality amongst Sweep 3 broker-led employers committed to Train to Gain training increased from 80 per cent at the initial interview, to 91 per cent a year down the line, 13 to 22 months after the initial contact with the skills brokerage service.

- 9.20 Whilst there have not been any quantitative or qualitative effects on training activity for employers in the 'substitution/deadweight' group, there is some evidence of Train to Gain allowing some of these employers to bring training forward. One in twenty (5 per cent) state that as a result of Train to Gain, staff had been able to undertake training at an earlier date. Where employers exhibiting substitution had had staff actually start the scheduled training by the time of survey, around one in six were reporting benefits such as improvements in the self-confidence of employees (18 per cent), improvements in the day to day running of the organisation (16 per cent), and brighter prospects for long term competitiveness (15 per cent). However, it is not clear to what extent these outcomes are in any way additional to what could have been achieved without Train to Gain.
- 9.21 Whilst there has been a persistent minority of employers across the evaluation who do not show additional value from the service at the first interview, despite the fact that they have committed to training, the incidence of such effects has increased across Sweeps 4 and 5 to one in four employers (24 per cent), approaching once again the higher level evident in Sweep 1 (27 per cent). As highlighted throughout this report, the importance employers place on financial support for training has increased in the recession, and this may be contributing to the proportion of employers deciding to 'move their training provision over' to Train to Gain in order to benefit from financial support. Indeed, when asked to give the reasons why they were attracted to Train to Gain, half (49 per cent) of the 'substitution/deadweight' employers reported spontaneously that they were motivated by the possibility of accessing financial support. It is conceivable that whilst the employer feels that they would have needed to undertake the same training in any case, the support available through the skills brokerage service has been important in allowing them to make savings and therefore free up capital for other areas of the business.
- 9.22 Although not for the same cohort of employers, the findings from Longitudinal Survey 3 (conducted at the same time as Sweep 5 of the broker-led evaluation in summer 2009) does provide some insight into why employers might have chosen to use Train to Gain training as a substitute for other training activity. Longitudinal Survey 3 respondents who said that staff trained through Train to Gain would have been likely to receive the same or similar training without the skills brokerage intervention were asked to give the reasons for training through Train to Gain instead. The key reasons were:
- Because the Train to Gain training was subsidised (44 per cent);
 - Because the Train to Gain skills broker prompted them to consider or recommended this particular course of training to them, meaning that this was the most salient option for meeting their known training need at that time (16 per cent);
 - As the training on offer through Train to Gain was considered more accessible in terms of timing or location (13 per cent) or more relevant and appropriate (10 per cent) compared to alternative courses.

Comparison of the additional impact of the Train to Gain service on training activity for broker-led and provider-led employers

- 9.23 This section compares the impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity for the Sweep 5 broker-led employers (initially accessing the skills brokerage service between November 2008 and March 2009), and the Sweep 1 provider-led employers who took up Train to Gain training during the same period by going direct to a training provider rather than through the skills brokerage service. To ensure comparability, findings are shown for the sub-set of the Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had had staff actually start training by the time of the initial interview.
- 9.24 One quarter of provider-led employers (26 per cent) had arranged for their employees to engage with vocational training leading to a formal qualification in the year prior to the survey, compared to one third (33 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers taking up training under Train to Gain.
- 9.25 In terms of the additionality for Level 2 trainees, provider-led employers report that as many as a third (33 per cent) of employees who undertook a Level 2 course through Train to Gain would have undertaken this qualification in any case. This is much higher than the equivalent figure for Level 2 trainees from Sweep 5 broker-led employers, only 12 per cent who were likely to have had training arranged for them at this level without the influence of Train to Gain. This fits with other findings throughout this report which suggest that provider-led employers are more likely to have a more urgent, pre-identified training need, associated with formal qualifications (see Chapters 7 and 12).
- 9.26 Figure 26 shows the quantitative and qualitative effects of Train to Gain on training activity, for all Sweep 1 provider-led employers and Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up some training through Train to Gain at the time of interview. Provider-led employers are significantly more likely to show quantitative effects in terms of being able to train staff who had not received training previously (68 per cent, compared to 64 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers) and using Train to Gain to extend training opportunities to more junior or less experienced staff (56 per cent, compared to 48 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers). They are less likely to say that they have been able to access training for higher numbers of staff, however (64 per cent, compared to 68 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers taking up training).

Figure 26: Quantitative and qualitative impact on training activity among employers who had taken up training through Train to Gain – comparison of broker-led and provider-led employers



9.27 Employers accessing Train to Gain training through a training provider rather than a skills broker are also significantly more likely to say that as a result they have been able to train staff to a higher qualification level than could otherwise have been achieved (72 per cent, compared to 60 per cent).

9.28 Table 18 shows the impact of Train to Gain on training activity for all Sweep 1 provider-led employers, including the two fifths (40 per cent) who had not arranged training for any staff in the year previously, and who therefore exhibit 'pure additionality'. Only one in twenty (5 per cent) do not report any quantitative or qualitative improvements in the training they offer as a result of accessing training through Train to Gain. The pattern of additionality for the Sweep 1 provider-led employers is similar to that for the Sweep 5 broker-led group, albeit with higher incidence of pure additionality, and a lower incidence of quantitative and/or qualitative additionality.

Table 18 : Summary of additionality effects associated with the Train to Gain service – comparison of provider-led and broker-led employers

	Sweep 1 Provider-led employers	Sweep 5 Broker- led employers – Taken up Train to Gain training	Combined Sweep 1 Provider-led employers and Sweep 5 Broker-led employers summary
Base (unweighted)	3,750	1,704	5,454
Additionality effect	%	%	%
Pure additionality	40	29	39
Quantitative additionality only	7	9	7
Qualitative additionality only	4	5	4
Both quantitative and qualitative additionality	44	50	45
Total additionality	95	93	95
Substitution	5	7	5

- 9.29 Combining the Sweep 1 provider-led employer and Sweep 5 broker-led employer findings on additionality allows some tentative conclusions to be drawn regarding the overall impact of Train to Gain on employer training activity. The right-hand column of Table 19 gives a summary of the additionality effects for the combined sample of provider-led and broker-led employers, based on those employers accessing training through Train to Gain. The findings have been weighted to reflect the incidence of each group in the Train to Gain employer population (12% broker-led, 88% provider-led).
- 9.30 As a result of the large population of Sweep 1 provider-led employers compared to the Sweep 5 broker-led cohort, the combined weighted figures are very similar to the additionality profile for the Sweep 1 provider-led employers. The combined figures indicate that, for those employers accessing training through Train to Gain, the vast majority (95 per cent) show some quantitative or qualitative improvement in the training offer to staff. In two fifths of cases (39 per cent) take up of Train to Gain provision has occurred in employers with no recent history of training, in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- 9.31 Note that the combined score should not be taken as a fully comprehensive indication of the impact of the Train to Gain service, excluding as it does the employers who did not engage in any training activity following contact with the skills brokerage service with regard to Train to Gain.

10 Employer satisfaction with training provision accessed through Train to Gain

Key findings

- 10.1 Overall satisfaction with the content and delivery of training provision accessed through Train to Gain is very high, with mean satisfaction scores for Sweep 5 broker-led employers and Sweep 1 provider-led employers standing at 8.53 and 8.45 out of 10 respectively.
- 10.2 In terms of satisfaction with specific aspects of the training accessed, both Sweep 5 broker-led employers and Sweep 1 provider-led employers were most satisfied with the convenience of the training delivery location (especially where training was delivered at the employer's site), the timing of training sessions, and the value for money of the training provided. Sweep 1 provider-led employers were more satisfied with the value for money of training accessed through Train to Gain, probably because of the higher proportion who had accessed full subsidies to support the training, thus reducing the cost to the employer.
- 10.3 Overall satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain declines significantly in the long term. Key issues which appear to contribute to this include a lack of effective follow up and continuity in contact between the provider and employer, and the fact that the expected level of financial support for training accessed through Train to Gain has not actually been available or been received by the employer.

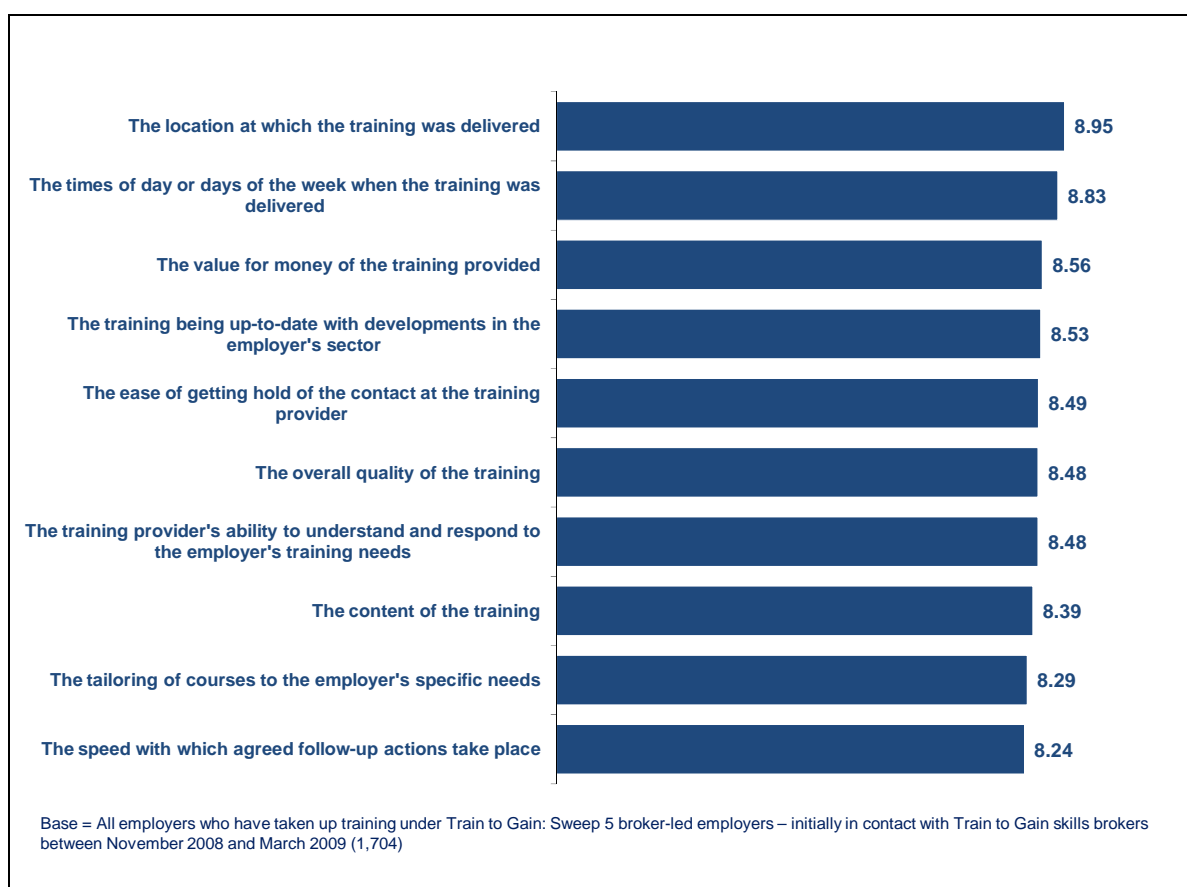
Introduction

- 10.4 This section looks at employer satisfaction with the training accessed through Train to Gain and the provider delivering this training. Specific areas explored include employer perceptions of the quality and relevance of the training content, the responsiveness of the training provider, and the convenience of the location and timing of training accessed through Train to Gain. Changes in employer ratings of satisfaction over the course of the evaluation will be discussed, as well as any changes in satisfaction with training over the course of engagement within the context of individual employers. Comparisons of satisfaction with training provision will be made for those who have accessed Train to Gain training through the skills brokerage service (Sweep 5 broker-led employers) and employers who were in direct contact with a training provider (Sweep 1 provider-led employers).

Satisfaction with individual aspects of training provision among new-user broker-led employers

10.5 Sweep 5 broker-led employers were asked to rate their satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain on a number of key measures. Satisfaction ratings for each aspect were given on a scale of 1 to 10, where a score of 1 indicated the employer was highly dissatisfied and 10 that they were highly satisfied. The mean satisfaction ratings given are displayed in order of satisfaction in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Satisfaction with individual aspects of training accessed through Train to Gain – Sweep 5 broker-led employers



10.6 All the mean satisfaction scores were above 8 out of 10; the highest mean score was for the location at which the training was delivered (8.95) and the lowest was for the speed with which the agreed follow up actions took place (mean rating of 8.24). Those employers who had accessed training delivered on site in the workplace were unsurprisingly more likely to be satisfied with the location of training (9.23) compared to those accessing training delivered off-site (8.62).

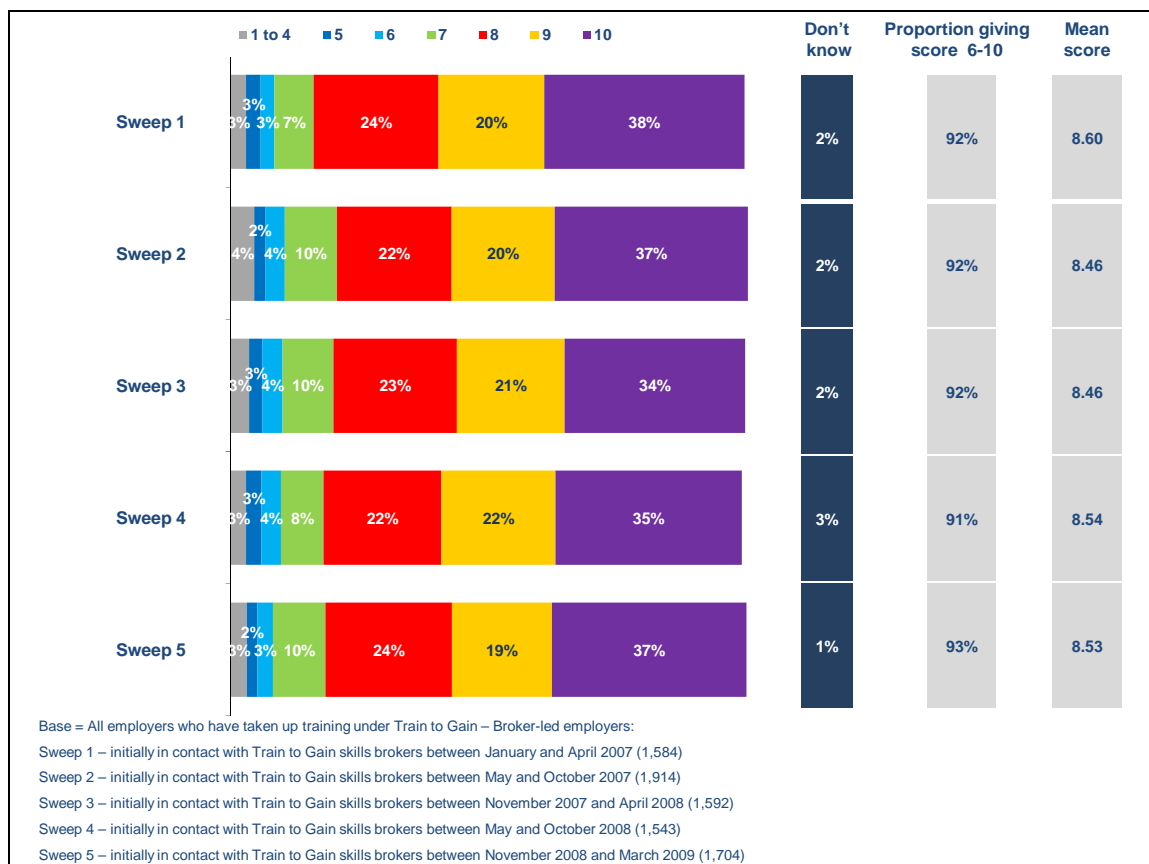
10.7 Along with the high levels of satisfaction for the extent of bespoke tailoring of courses to the employer's needs (mean satisfaction score of 8.29), high levels of satisfaction with the timing and delivery of training suggest that providers are offering highly

flexible training and assessment services to meet employer needs and to work around constraints. This corroborates the findings of the Ofsted report on the impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment, which concluded that:

“The providers visited for this survey worked hard to understand the needs of the businesses with which they were working. They offered highly flexible training and assessment arrangements which met employers’ and employees’ needs. For example, assessments took place at employees’ places of work and accommodated employers’ working requirements and employees’ shift patterns.”
(Ofsted, 2008, p.11)

- 10.8 Satisfaction was high across all ten aspects of training measured, as it has been for the previous four sweeps of the evaluation. There has only been one statistically significant increase in mean satisfaction between Sweep 4 and Sweep 5, in terms of employers satisfaction with the location at which the training was delivered (8.95 in Sweep 5 up from 8.85 in Sweep 4).
- 10.9 Sweep 5 broker-led employers were also asked to give an overall satisfaction rating for the training they had received through Train to Gain, using the same ten point scale. The mean overall satisfaction score of 8.53 is very encouraging, and is consistent with that recorded at Sweep 4 (8.54). This is also in line with the findings of the Ofsted report on Train to Gain which found high levels of satisfaction amongst employees undertaking Train to Gain training (Ofsted, 2008, p.9).
- 10.10 Figure 28 shows the change in satisfaction ratings across the course of evaluation (Sweeps 1 to 5). A score of 1-4 out of 10 was taken to indicate dissatisfaction, and a score of 6-10 to indicate satisfaction.

Figure 28: Overall satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain



10.11 Over nine in ten broker-led employers who accessed training through Train to Gain at each sweep have said they are satisfied with the training and training provider used. This is in line with the findings from the evaluation of learner views (The Institute for Employment Studies, 2009, p.1), which showed that 95 per cent of new entrant Train to Gain learners were satisfied with their training overall, and 94 per cent were satisfied with the quality of teaching.

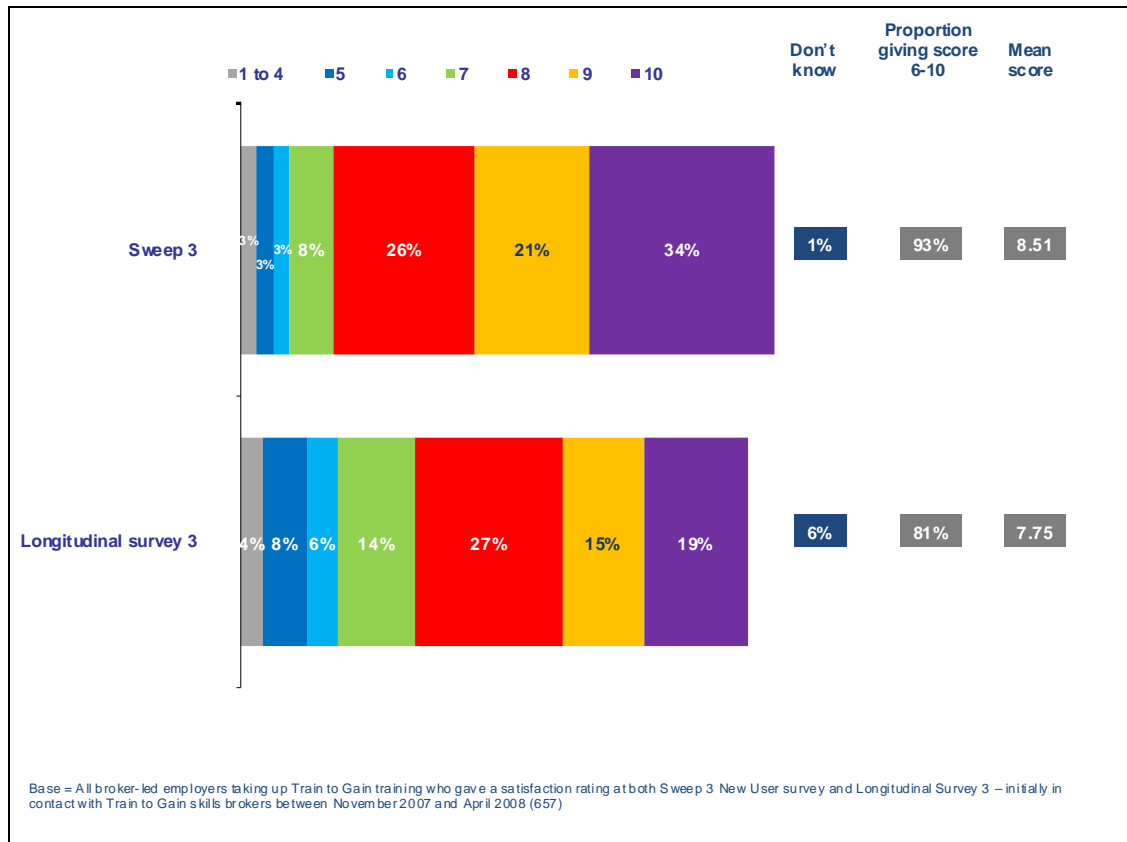
10.12 In Sweep 5 there were no significant differences in overall satisfaction by type of provider, or by delivery mode.

10.13 Amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers, there were still a small minority who said they were not satisfied with the training they had accessed (3 per cent). The most commonly cited reason for dissatisfaction was that the delivery of the training was of a poor quality, that is, the teaching and assessment was poor or rushed, with one quarter (24 per cent) of those dissatisfied citing this as a reason. This fits with the perceptions of those learners who experienced problems with their training, where problems with assessment and the quality of teaching were the concerns most commonly raised (The Institute for Employment Studies, 2009, p.6).

Changes in satisfaction with training provision over time

10.14 Looking at the longitudinal data comparisons can be made for those who gave initial satisfaction ratings shortly after their first contact with Train to Gain with how they feel about it one year on, 13 to 22 months after their first contact. On both occasions employers were giving their rating in relation to all Train to Gain training they had received up to that point, so by the time of the longitudinal survey they may have had more exposure to the training than previously. Figure 29 shows the scores given in the initial sweep and the longitudinal follow up.

Figure 29: Longitudinal changes in satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain



10.15 Overall satisfaction with training accessed through Train to Gain declines significantly in the long term. Longitudinal broker-led employers (Longitudinal survey 3) who had accessed training through Train to Gain were significantly less satisfied than the broker-led employers giving a rating at Sweep 3, a few months after the initial contact. The proportion giving a rating of 6 or more out of 10 declined from 93 per cent to 81 per cent, and the mean score down from 8.51 to 7.75.

10.16 Looking on an individual employer basis, almost half (45 per cent) gave a lower rating in the second survey as they did in the first. In comparison, 17 per cent gave a higher rating and 31 per cent gave the same rating as previously. This pattern was consistent across size and sector.

10.17 It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for this decline in satisfaction over the longer term, as the evaluation only collects information on reasons for dissatisfaction (for those giving a score of between 1 and 4 on the ten point satisfaction scale), and not the reasons why employers have given a lower score when followed up (e.g. where they have given a score of 5 rather than 8, as at the first point of survey). The key reasons given for employers being dissatisfied with training when followed up for the longitudinal survey can be used, however, as indicative markers for problems that become more frequent in employer interactions with the training provider over time. Key issues which appear more prominent amongst longitudinal Survey 3 employers include a lack of effective follow up and continuity in contact between the provider and employer (30 per cent of those dissatisfied, compared to 20 per cent at the initial survey) and the fact that the expected level of financial support for training accessed through Train to Gain has not actually been available or been received (22 per cent). Thus there is evidence that in some cases initial enthusiasm for training and satisfaction with the training accessed is linked to the availability of subsidies or other financial support available through Train to Gain. It should be noted, however, that satisfaction with training provision remains high in the long term, with over one third of employers who have accessed training giving a satisfaction score of 9 or 10.

10.18 Other concerns raised by employers who expressed dissatisfaction with training at longitudinal Survey 3 include issues with the quality of training and especially assessment (22 per cent), disorganisation and poor administration on the part of the provider (6 per cent) and problems with the course not being able to be completed because of problems with a lack of assessor availability or the course being shut down (5 per cent). These are consistent with issues raised by employers in the short term, suggesting that these problems persist in a minority of cases throughout the engagement with Train to Gain training.

Comparisons with satisfaction among provider-led employers

10.19 Overall, Sweep 1 provider-led employers were very slightly less satisfied overall than Sweep 5 broker-led employers with the training provision, giving a mean overall rating of 8.45 out of 10 compared to 8.53 for Sweep 5 broker-led employers; however this small difference is not statistically significant.

10.20 Sweep 1 provider-led employers were asked to give satisfaction ratings for seven of the specific aspects of training provision assessed for Sweep 5 broker-led employers. The mean satisfaction scores were very similar to those seen for Sweep 5 broker-led employers (Table 19).

Table 19: Comparison of mean satisfaction with specific aspects of training accessed through Train to Gain for Sweep 1 provider-led and Sweep 5 broker-led employers

Specific aspect of training provision	Sweep 1 provider-led employers	Sweep 5 broker-led employers
Base = All employers taking up training	3,750	1,704
The location at which the training was delivered	9.08	8.95
The value for money of the training provided	8.88	8.56
The times of day or days of the week when the training was delivered	8.77	8.83
The training being up-to-date with developments in the employer's sector	8.49	8.53
The overall quality of the training	8.47	8.48
The content of the training	8.37	8.39
The tailoring of courses to the employer's specific needs	8.32	8.29

10.21 The only statistically significant differences evident for the convenience of the training location (9.08 compared to 8.95) and the value for money of the training provided (8.88 compared to 8.56). In terms of the higher level of satisfaction with the training location, this may reflect that providers focus on a relatively small local area when engaging employers, or that employers approaching a college with a direct request for Train to Gain provision are likely to approach a local provider, and that, conversely, skills brokers are more likely to direct employers towards more suitable or specialised training options further afield. The higher level of satisfaction with the value for money of training accessed amongst Sweep 1 provider-led employers is likely to be linked to the fact that these employers are more likely to have accessed full subsidies to support training (79 per cent) than Sweep 5 broker-led employers training through Train to Gain (54 per cent).

Combined broker-led and provider-led overall satisfaction score

10.22 By looking at a combined average of the satisfaction scores, it is possible to give an overall satisfaction score across all employers who have accessed training through Train to Gain. This includes all Sweep 1 provider-led employers, who all had staff start some Train to Gain training in the period November 2008 to March 2009. It also includes satisfaction scores given by the sub-set of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had staff enrol on Train to Gain training any time between November 2008 and the time of survey in June-August 2009. The combined satisfaction score for training provision is 8.45 out of ten (on a base of 5,396 employers).

11 The impact of Train to Gain on employer performance

Key findings

- 11.1 The impact of Organisational Needs Analyses received by Sweep 5 broker-led employers was assessed. Most employers said that the ONA had had a positive impact, with employers most likely to consider the ONA as effective in increasing their awareness of relevant training opportunities (78 per cent agreeing). Slightly lower proportions agreed that the ONA had helped identify current skills gaps amongst employees and future skills needs (56 and 57 per cent respectively).
- 11.2 Amongst Sweep 5 new user broker-led employers who had already taken up training at the first interview (a few months after the initial skills brokerage contact), over nine in ten (97 per cent) were already reporting some immediate benefits from this training. Over three-quarters reported that Train to Gain training had furnished staff with skills of direct relevance to their job role and which had resulted in an increase in their performance (77 per cent).
- 11.3 Employers who have accessed Train to Gain training are also likely to report a positive impact of this training on the operation of the organisation as a whole, even in the short-term, only a few months after the initial contact with Train to Gain. Seven in ten (70 per cent) felt that the training had improved the day-to-day operation of the company or organisation. There has been an increase at Sweep 5 in the proportion of employers confident that the training will contribute to longer-term competitiveness (up to the same high level as seen at Sweep 3: 68 per cent).
- 11.4 Over half of Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up training reported an increase in product or service quality (56 per cent) and in staff productivity (54 per cent). As in previous sweeps, there were fewer employers reporting that Train to Gain had increased sales and turnover or profit margins in the short-term. Four in ten employers training (41 per cent) agreed that the training accessed through Train to Gain had helped the business cope with the recession.
- 11.5 When broker-led employers were resurveyed as part of Longitudinal Survey 3 (13 to 22 months after their initial contact with the skills broker) significantly more employers reported that Train to Gain training had had a beneficial effect on their organisation than when they were first asked to evaluate the effect of training at the first interview. The most marked increases can be seen in relation to quality standards (from 60 per cent to 79 per cent) and improved profit margins (17 per cent to 26 per cent).
- 11.6 Sweep 1 provider-led employers were also asked about the impact Train to Gain had had on their business and the benefits they had found. On the whole provider-led employers were slightly more positive than broker-led employers, but they tended to see similar benefits to their business. The difference between the two cohorts is most marked in relation to the proportion agreeing that the training has helped them to meet

their legal requirement to train staff (75 per cent, compared with 58 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers) and in employees gaining qualifications (75 per cent compared with 56 per cent of broker-led employers). Note that Train to Gain does not fund mandatory or legally required training per se however the intricacies of this may mean that where a license to practise is not required it may be possible to fund qualifications.

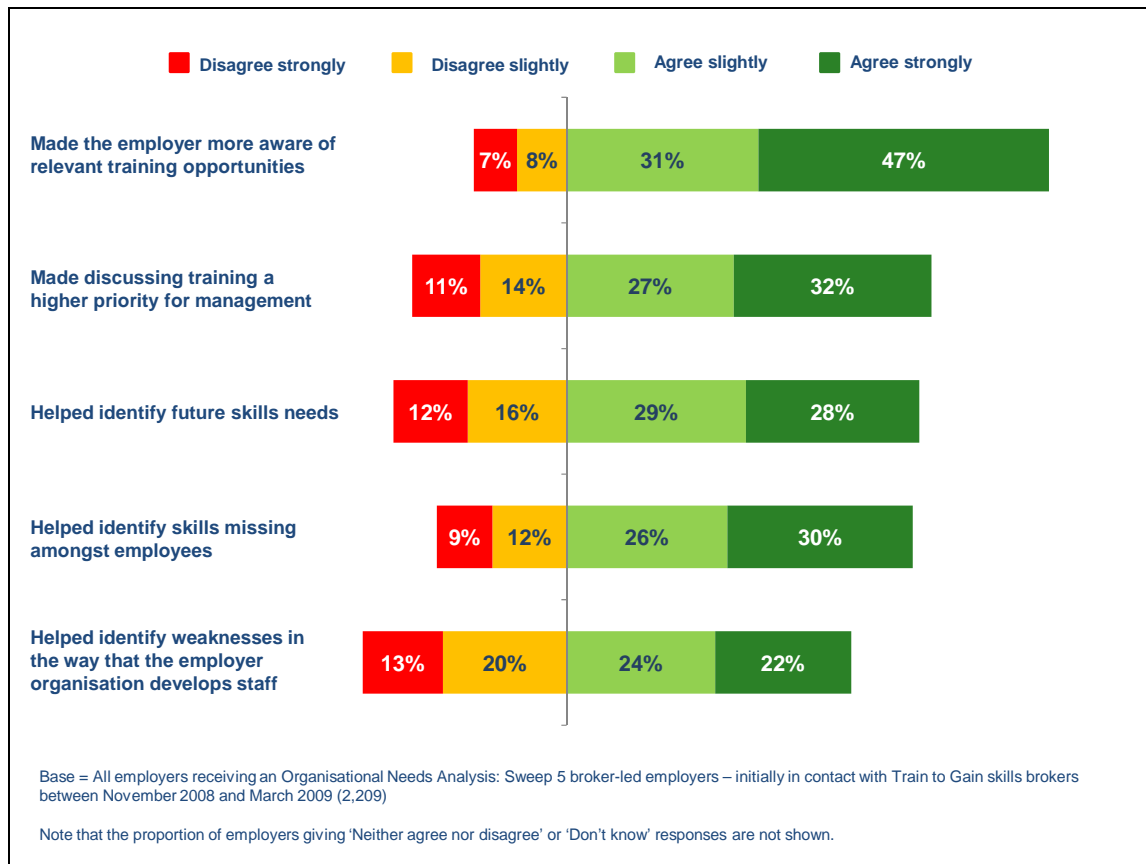
Introduction

- 11.7 This chapter looks at the impact of advice and guidance services accessed through Train to Gain on the way that employers view training, and their awareness of skill needs and training opportunities. It also highlights the impact of training undertaken through Train to Gain on employee skills, confidence and productivity, and the impact on the operational and financial performance of employer organisations. Reciprocal benefits for employees and employers arising in the long term are highlighted, in addition to the benefits experienced by Sweep 5 broker-led and Sweep 1 provider-led employers a few months after their initial contact with Train to Gain.

Impact from the skills brokerage service in the short-term

- 11.8 Around three-fifths (58 per cent) of Sweep 5 broker-led employers had undergone a formal Organisation Needs Analysis (ONA) as part of their involvement with the skills brokerage service, at the time of interview a few months after their initial contact. This provided the opportunity to measure the benefits to the employer of the ONA, in terms of raising awareness of the organisation's skill needs, in identifying solutions through training, and in raising the profile of training within the organisation.
- 11.9 Figure 30 shows that for each aspect measured, more employers agreed than disagreed that the ONA had made a positive impact to the establishment. As in Sweep 4, employers were most likely to consider the ONA as effective in increasing their awareness of relevant training opportunities, with over three quarters (78 per cent) of employers agreeing that the ONA had had a positive impact in this regard. Six in ten (60 per cent) agreed the ONA encouraged greater discussion of training amongst the management, and similar proportions agreed the ONA had helped identify future skills needs and current skills missing amongst employees (57 and 56 per cent respectively). Over two fifths (45 per cent) felt that their ONA had helped identify weaknesses in the way they develop staff; a third (33 per cent) felt this had not been the case.
- 11.10 This suggests that the key value of the ONA from the employer's point of view is in raising awareness of training opportunities, rather than appraising the current and future skills and development needs of each individual business (although there was still a sizeable proportion agreeing it had done this as well).

Figure 30: Impact of Organisational Needs Analysis

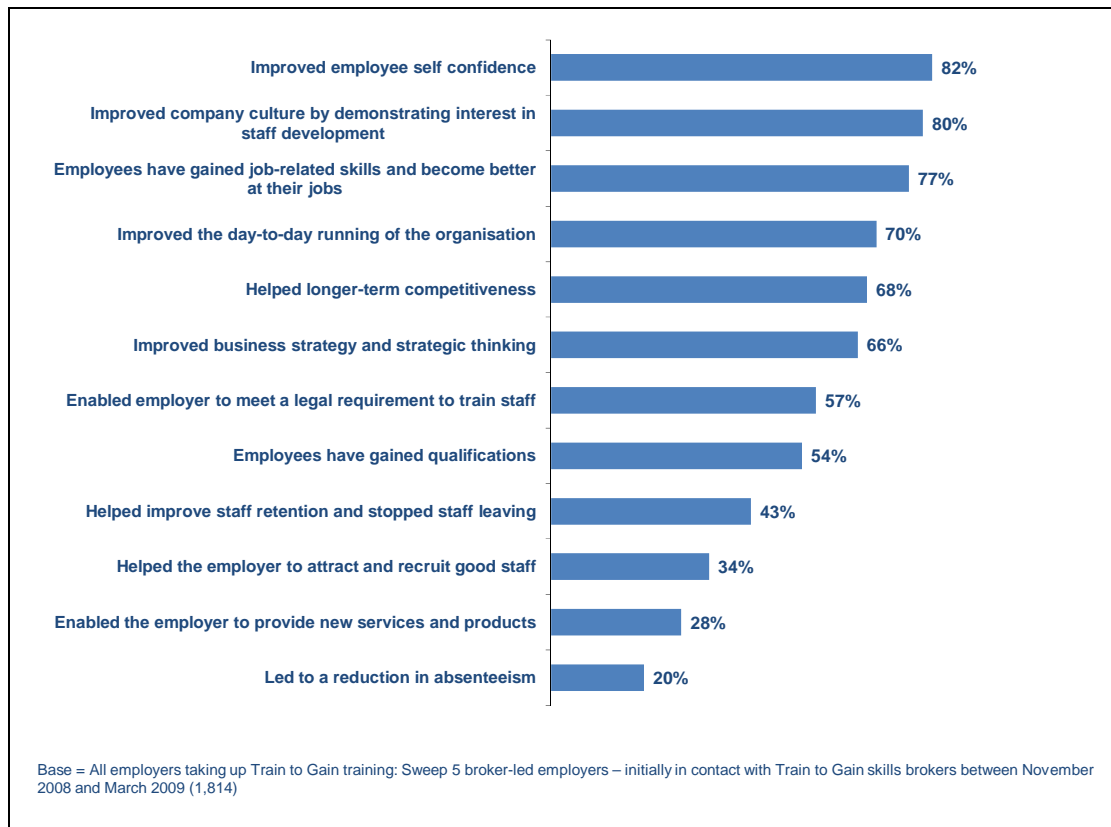


The findings suggest that the ONA adds less value in cases where the employer has a recent history of training (in the 12 months prior to involvement with Train to Gain). These employers are significantly more likely to disagree that the ONA has had a positive impact in helping them to identify skills missing amongst employees (22 per cent disagree, compared to 17 per cent with no training activity in the previous year) or in identifying weaknesses in the way that the organisation develops staff (35 per cent disagree, compared to 29 per cent of those not training outside Train to Gain). However, these employers were just as likely to say that the ONA had helped them to identify further relevant training opportunities to develop their training offer to staff (47 per cent agree strongly, the same proportion as for employers overall).

Benefits arising from Train to Gain training

11.11 The most immediate benefits associated with employer involvement with Train to Gain training, as evidenced by those Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had undertaken training through Train to Gain at the time of the survey, are shown in Figure 30. They include benefits for the employee trainee, and subsequent benefits arising for the employer organisation as a whole. Note that this question was asked on a prompted basis, that is, employers were asked whether they had experienced each of a list of benefits read out to them.

Figure 31: Benefits of Train to Gain training in the short term – Sweep 5 broker-led employers



11.12 It is clear that even a few months after the initial contact with the skills brokerage service, employees and employers are already reaping the benefits of training through Train to Gain. For eight of the potential benefits assessed, over half of all employers accessing training through Train to Gain agreed that these were already evident as a result of the training. Amongst those Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up training by the time of the first interview, almost all (97 per cent) were reporting one or more of the benefits shown in Figure 35 above.

11.13 In terms of employee-level impacts, it is clear that there is a high level of agreement amongst employers that Train to Gain training is beneficial to employee self-confidence (82 per cent), and in furnishing staff with skills that are of direct relevance to their job role and which result in an increase in their performance (77 per cent). Over half of employers taking up Train to Gain training (54 per cent) cited employees gaining qualifications as a key benefit of Train to Gain.

11.14 In a substantial proportion of cases, the benefits of Train to Gain training carry over to a greater degree of commitment on the part of employees; one fifth (20 per cent) of employers accessing training reported that this had led to a reduction in absenteeism, and two-fifths (43 per cent) thought that it had already had a positive impact on the organisation’s ability to retain staff. Eight in ten employers who had staff

undertake training (80 per cent) felt that this was helping them improve company culture, as it demonstrated the commitment management have to staff development.

11.15 Employers who have accessed Train to Gain training are also likely to report a positive impact of this training on the operation of the organisation as a whole, even in the short-term, only a few months after the initial contact with Train to Gain. Seven in ten (70 per cent) felt that the training had improved the day-to-day operation of the company or organisation, whilst in two-thirds of cases (66 per cent) there had also been a positive effect at a more strategic level (improved business strategy and strategic thinking). Train to Gain training also acts as a catalyst or enabler for innovation, with nearly three in ten employers who had accessed training (28 per cent) indicating that this had enabled them to provide new products or services. Even at this early stage of involvement with the Train to Gain service, as many as two-thirds of employers training (68 per cent) were confident that the training would contribute directly to the longer-term competitiveness of the organisation.

11.16 A substantial minority of employers who had taken up training through Train to Gain (34 per cent) felt that this had helped them to attract and recruit good, well-skilled staff. There is some tentative evidence in the data to suggest that positive impacts on the ability of an organisation to attract staff may be linked to the organisation being able to offer statutory training that is of value to individuals looking to develop their career in particular sectors. The majority of employers who reported a positive impact of Train to Gain on their ability to recruit good staff (80 per cent) also said that Train to Gain had enabled them to meet legal requirements for staff training.

11.17 Taken together, these findings on the benefits of Train to Gain in the short-term support those found by the Ofsted report on Train to Gain, which found that:

“Train to Gain was successful in raising employees’ personal skills and knowledge and in providing them with qualifications to recognise their vocational competence. Although few of the employers visited had formal systems for measuring the impact of training on their profitability, over three quarters reported various benefits such as improvements in work practice, staff retention or, in a few cases, improved competitiveness.”
(Ofsted, 2008, p.4)

11.18 The pattern of reported benefits of Train to Gain training has remained very stable over the five Sweeps of the evaluation. The only stand-out changes at Sweep 5 are an increase in the proportion of employers agreeing that they are confident that the training will contribute to longer-term competitiveness (up to the same high level as seen at Sweep 3: 68 per cent), and the fall in the proportion of employers agreeing that they have experienced the following impacts:

- A positive impact on the ability of the organisation to attract and recruit good staff (34 per cent, down from the equivalent level of 37 to 40 per cent across Sweeps 1 to 4).
- The ability of the organisation to meet the legal requirement to deliver training to staff (57 per cent, compared to 62 to 67 per cent across Sweeps 1 to 4).

This should be seen as a step in the right direction, as Train to Gain is not designed to assist employers with these obligations.

- In terms of benefits in attracting good staff, this may be deflated by the drop in overall recruitment activity accompanying the recession.

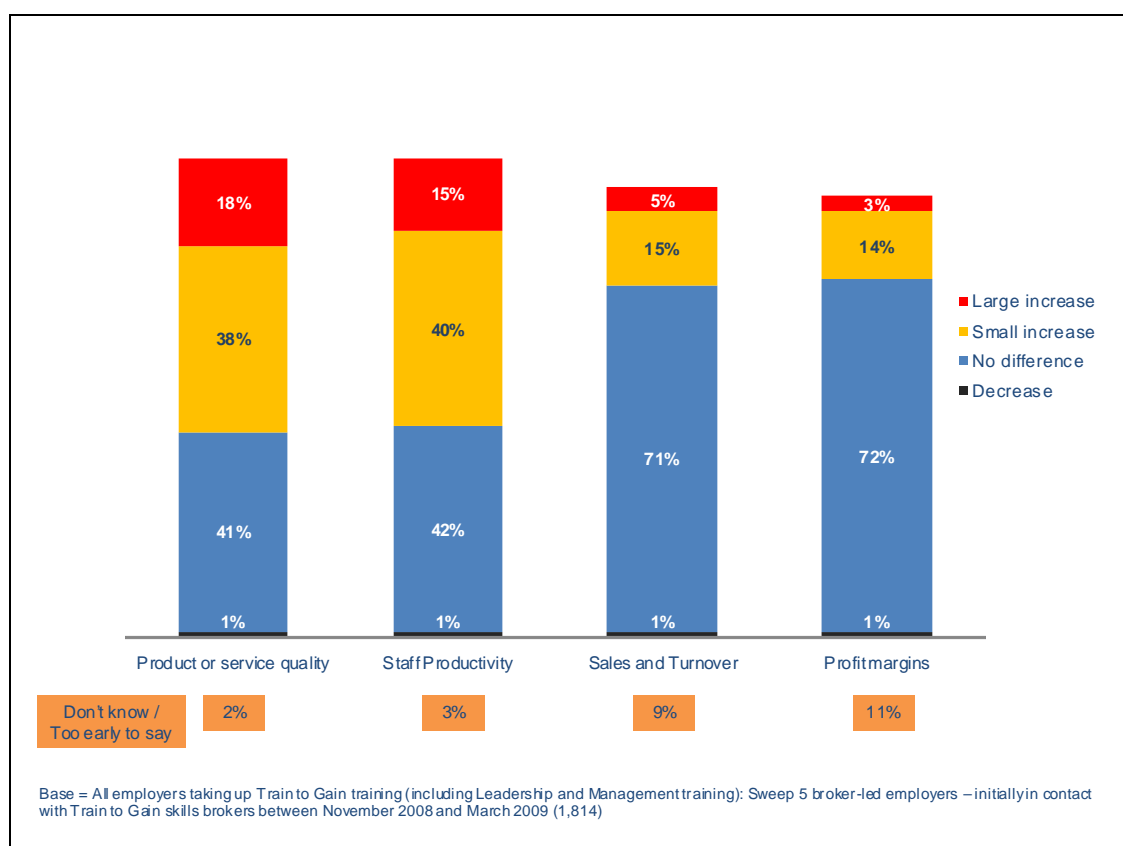
11.19 Where employers have accessed Leadership and Management training through Train to Gain, they are particularly likely to report improvements in business strategy and strategic thinking amongst team members (76 per cent, compared to the average of 66 per cent) and in the efficiency of the day-to-day running of the organisation (77 per cent vs. 70 per cent overall).

11.20 Training staff to Level 3 also leads to additional benefits over training at a lower level. Employers accessing training at Level 3 through Train to Gain were significantly more likely to report the following benefits to the organisation, compared to the average across all employers training:

- An improvement in staff retention (56 per cent, vs. 43 per cent) and in the ability of the employer to attract and recruit good staff (48 per cent vs. 34 per cent);
- Employees having improved job-related skills and becoming better at their jobs (82 per cent vs. 77 per cent overall);
- and an improvement in the day-to-day running of the organisation (76 per cent vs. 70 per cent).

11.21 Sweep 5 broker-led employers were also asked in more detail about the extent to which they had experienced four tangible operational and financial benefits from their involvement with Train to Gain. Figure 32 details the responses.

Figure 32: Effect of Train to Gain broker-led training on four key financial or operational benefits



11.22 The most prominent positive changes came in product or service quality and in staff productivity, with over half of employers who had taken up training (56 and 54 per cent respectively) reporting an increase/improvement. This is at the same level as seen in Sweep 4. Bearing in mind that this measure was taken only a few months after the initial contact, it is encouraging that such a high number have seen an improvement at an early stage. The previously reported scores for employees improving their skills and becoming better at their jobs, as well as reduced absenteeism and improved self confidence could all have fed into this improvement. Across all measures (product/service quality, staff productivity, sales and turnover and profit margins) just one per cent of employers reported there had been a decrease in performance as a result of engaging with Train to Gain training.

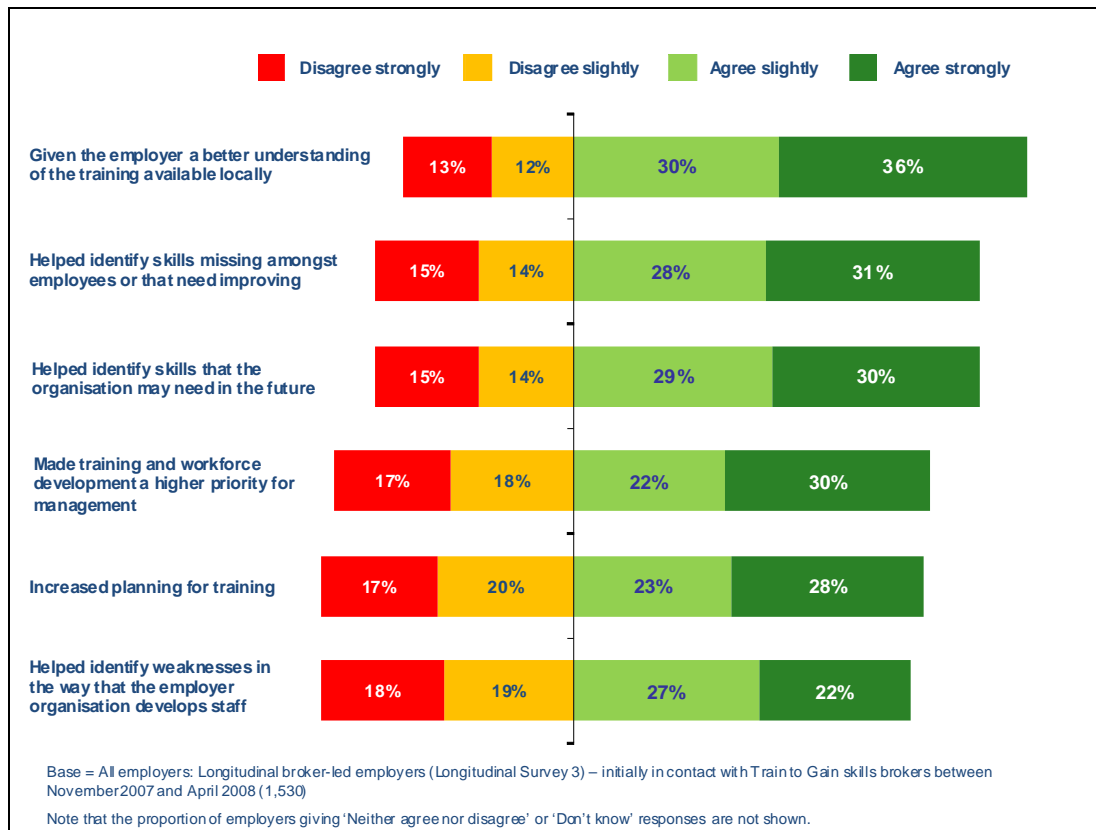
11.23 As in Sweep 4, there were fewer employers reporting that Train to Gain had increased sales and turnover or profit margins in the short-term. The majority said they had seen no difference in these financial outcomes as a result of Train to Gain by the time of survey (71 per cent for sales and turnover, and 72 per cent for profit margins). The slight exception to this was amongst employers from the Wholesale and Retail sector, where three fifths (29 per cent) of employers reported an increase in sales and turnover compared to 19 per cent overall, and almost a quarter (23 per cent) reported increased profit margins compared to 17 per cent overall. It could be that training shop floor staff in retail outlets are able to have a more immediate impact on sales due to the nature of the interaction between customers and staff.

- 11.24 There was also a relatively high proportion of employers who had taken up training who did not know whether this had impacted on financial performance (9 per cent for sales and turnover, and 11 per cent for profit margins). Often employers were unable to assess the impact of Train to Gain on these measures because it was too early for them to measure the effect and because training was either still underway or only recently completed. It is likely also that some of this uncertainty about the impact on financial measures is due to the lack of assessment of these impacts on performance by the employer. It may be that some of the employers saying that there has been 'no difference' to financial performance do not have systems in place to measure the impact (as supported by findings in the Ofsted report - Ofsted, 2008, p.4).
- 11.25 Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had already taken up training at the time of interview were asked to what extent they felt that the training accessed had helped their business cope with the economic downturn and financial crisis. Four in ten employers training (41 per cent) agreed that the training accessed through Train to Gain had helped the business cope with the difficult economic circumstances (equivalent to 20 per cent of all Sweep 5 broker-led employers). These employers were significantly more likely to report each of the benefits listed in Figure 35 and improvements in the outcome measures shown in Figure 36. There were no significant differences by sector or by the size of employer, or according to whether the employer had already arranged training for staff outside Train to Gain in the preceding year, suggesting that Train to Gain has a role in helping a wide range of employers in the recession.
- 11.26 Two thirds of employers who had taken up training (65 per cent) felt that Train to Gain had helped their business to be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that an economic upturn may present. This rises to 85 per cent amongst employers who agree that Train to Gain has helped them develop new products or services. Small employers with fewer than ten staff were also more likely to say that they would be in a better position to respond as a result of training their staff through Train to Gain (68 per cent).

The impact of Train to Gain on employer training culture and organisational performance in the longer-term

- 11.27 The data from Longitudinal Survey 3 provides an opportunity to explore the long-term impact of the Train to Gain service (both skills brokerage and training elements) on employers. The findings in this section refer to the views of employers 13 to 22 months after the initial engagement with the Train to Gain skills brokerage service.
- 11.28 A key issue explored in the longitudinal survey work is the impact that Train to Gain has had on the way training and workforce development is viewed in the workplace and general changes to the employers' training culture.
- 11.29 Broker-led employers from Longitudinal Survey 3 were asked about the extent to which the Train to Gain service had had an impact in various areas of training and development strategy. Note that all employers participating in Longitudinal Survey 3 were asked these questions, even if they did not go on to take up any training opportunities following discussions with the skills broker. This meant that it was possible to collect a more full assessment of the value of the service. As with the broker-led new users from Sweep 5, it was in raising awareness of training opportunities that Train to Gain had the most impact (see Figure 32). There was less impact on the structure and prominence of training in the workplace. This is in line with findings from Longitudinal Survey 2.

Figure 33: Longer-term impact of Train to Gain on training culture

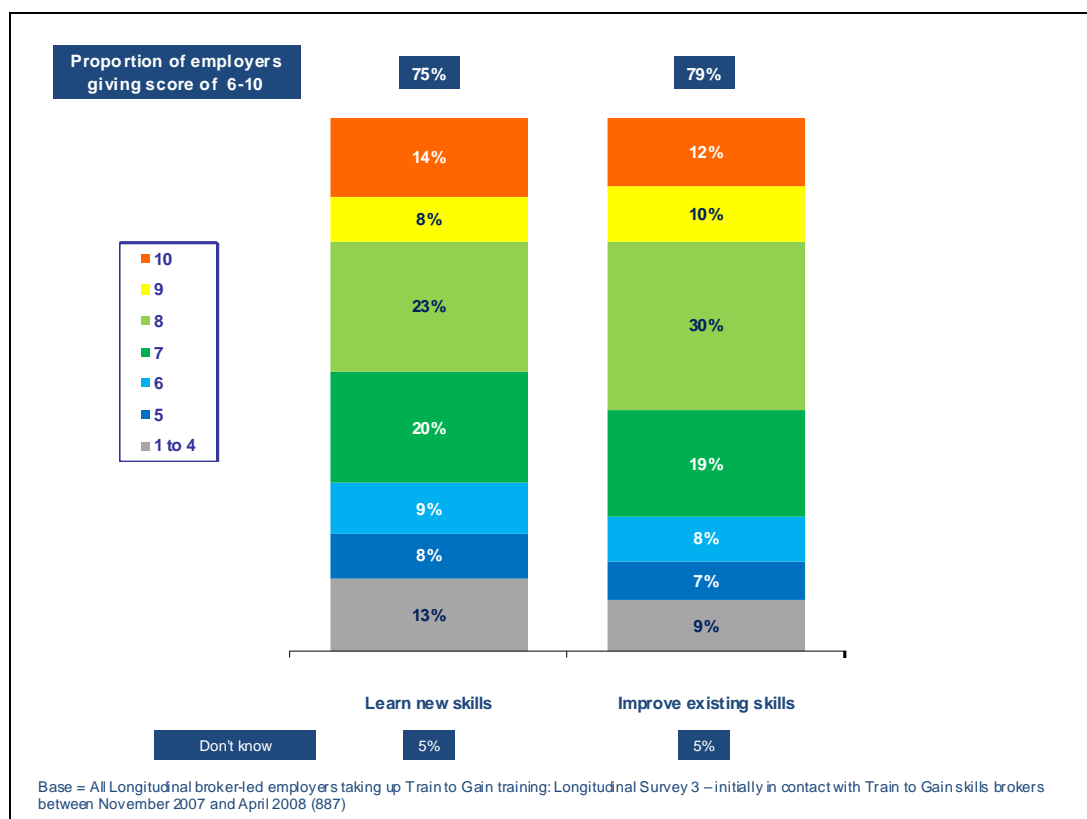


11.30 These employers were also asked to indicate the impact Train to Gain had had on three key aspects of their training strategy. The proportion in agreement that there had been an impact was high:

- improved the company culture by demonstrating that the employer is interested in staff development (79 per cent of all employers);
- improved the quality of training that is undertaken by the establishment (45 per cent, 77 per cent amongst those training through Train to Gain);
- increased the amount of training undertaken (42 per cent, 72 per cent amongst those training through Train to Gain).

11.31 In order to investigate the impact of Train to Gain training on employees in the longer-term, the employers taking part in Longitudinal Survey 3 who had undertaken training through Train to Gain were asked whether this had led to staff developing new skills and/or improving their existing skills. Employers rated both of these measures on a scale of one to ten where one meant there had been no development of skills at all and ten that employees had developed their skills to a great extent. Figure 34 shows that three quarters (75 per cent) gave a score of between 6 and 10 for the extent to which Train to Gain led to employees developing new skills and four fifths (79 per cent) for the extent to which employees had developed existing skills.

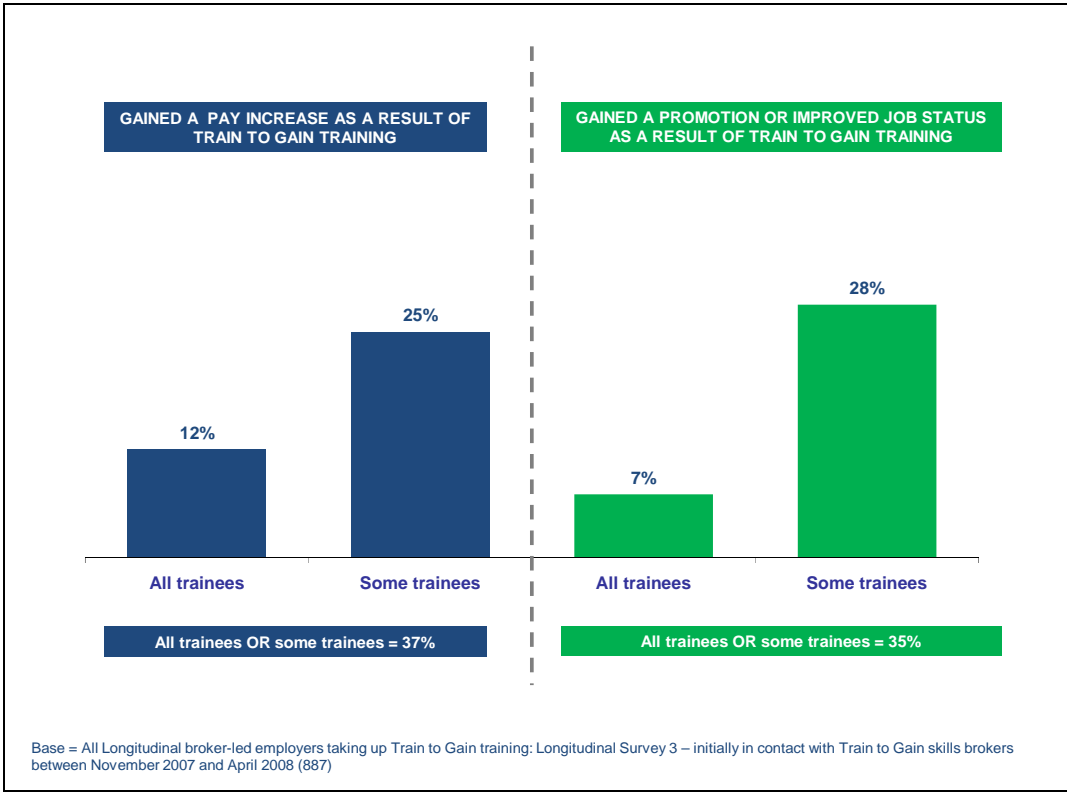
Figure 34: Extent to which Train to Gain training has impacted on employees' existing skills, and extent to which it has enabled employees to develop new skills



11.32 Looking at the benefits of Train to Gain long term also allows us to examine the progress of individuals trained through Train to Gain, and what benefits they receive in the context of demand-led provision. It has been seen that in the short term employers feel that employees have gained in confidence and become better at their jobs as a result of the training. The longitudinal work allows us to look at whether this has had a positive effect on the employee's career.

11.33 Figure 35 shows that in two-fifths of cases where employers had trained through Train to Gain (37 per cent) at least some trainees went on to receive a pay increase as a result of their training. This is slightly down on the previous longitudinal survey where two fifths (41 per cent) of employers had given employees pay increases as a result of Train to Gain, and could be due to the economic downturn; fewer pay increases are being given on the whole. Just over one third of employers whose staff had gone through training (35 per cent) had given promotions to, or improved the job status of, at least some of their trainees.

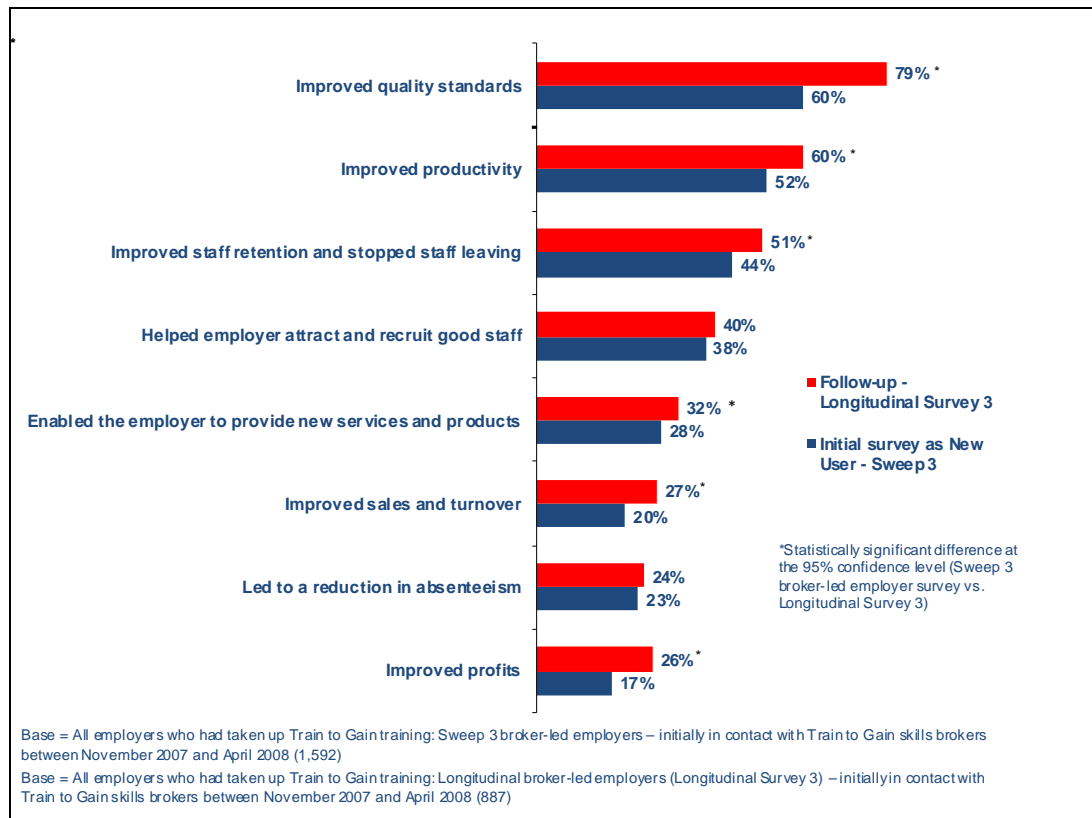
Figure 35: The proportion of employer offering pay rises and promotions to employees participating in Train to Gain training



11.34 Figure 40 highlights the long-term benefits of Train to Gain training, by showing the improvements experienced as a result of training when broker-led employers were resurveyed as part of Longitudinal Survey 3, 13 to 22 months after their initial contact with the skills broker. To allow time-series comparison, the lower bar on the graph shows the responses given by this cohort of broker-led employers in Sweep 3, a few months after their initial contact with the skills brokerage service. Data for both series is shown based on all employers training at each survey point.

11.35 The chart shows the proportion of employers who had experienced the benefits listed by the time of the first interview, and the proportion who reported these impacts a year on. It should be noted that for four of the categories ('improved quality standards', 'improved productivity', 'improved sales and turnover', 'improved profits'), the question format used in the follow-up interviews was slightly different to that used in the original interviews. For the initial interview, Figure 36 shows the proportion of employers reporting that these elements had shown a "large increase" or a "small increase". The follow-up interview figures refer to the proportion of employers reporting that they had experienced these benefits at all, that is, in the form of a "Yes" or "No" question.

Figure 36: Proportion of employers experiencing benefits of Train to Gain training at the initial interview and the follow-up interview



11.36 The proportion of employers seeing the benefits listed above had increased in every area. For most of the benefits listed, this increase was statistically significant, with significantly more employers reporting that Train to Gain training had had a beneficial effect in the long-term than when they were first asked to evaluate the effect of training at the first interview. The most marked increases can be seen in relation to quality standards (from 60 per cent to 79 per cent) and improved profit margins (17 per cent to 26 per cent).

11.37 The findings for the longitudinal broker-led employer cohort presented in Figure 40 cover all employers who had staff undertake training at any point during their involvement with Train to Gain. Some of these employers had taken up training at the time of the first interview but not gone on to access any further training opportunities after this point, in advance of the follow-up interview. The proportions of these employers reporting key benefits at Longitudinal Survey 3 are generally in line with the short-term figures shown in Figure 40; the only areas where there had been statistically significant increases were on hard financial measures (sales and turnover, and improved profits) and in terms of overall quality standards. This would indicate that the benefits of Train to Gain training are quite immediate, apart from impacts on quality, turnover and profitability which emerge more strongly over time. Whilst the benefits of Train to Gain training identified early in the training cycle are sustained over the long-term, those who do not take on additional training do not show any real growth in the impact on the organisation. Most of the increase in each benefit evident

in Figure 40 can be accounted for by the additional benefits experienced by those employers who undertook (further) training following the initial survey.

11.38 Two other impact measures were included in the Longitudinal Survey but not at the earlier Sweep 3 new user survey. These related to improvements in customer service standards and improvements in the image of the organisation across the sector they work in (72 per cent and 60 per cent of Longitudinal broker-led employers agreed that these had been results of Train to Gain training respectively).

Negative impacts on business from Train to Gain training

11.39 Alongside the benefits illustrated, some employers did identify negative aspects to employee participation in Train to Gain training. Longitudinal broker-led employers were asked whether they agreed that they had experienced a number of negative impacts on their organisation as a result of this training activity.

11.40 When prompted, employers were most likely to agree that wage costs had increased as staff become more highly skilled or qualified (37 per cent). It could be argued that the “negative” impact of increased wages due to increased skills levels is in fact a positive reflection of successful training and a sign of employees’ progress. In many cases this would be offset by the increase in productivity and profitability previously discussed.

11.41 One quarter (27 per cent) also agreed that they had encountered problems in managing employee demand for training, with members of staff who the employer does not consider to need training wanting to participate in similar training to that accessed through Train to Gain.

11.42 Smaller proportions of employers agreed when prompted that they had experienced the following negative effects:

- Reduced productivity due to hours spent training (11 per cent)
- Management time involved in administering the training (10 per cent)
- Being unable to meet customer or production requirements as staff away training (7 per cent).

11.43 Around one in twenty employers who had undertaken training (6 per cent) reported that staff members had left the organisation as a result of completing training through Train to Gain. The majority said this was because the employee had been able to use their new skills (72 per cent) or qualifications (78 per cent) to find a better job.

Impact of Train to Gain among provider-led employers

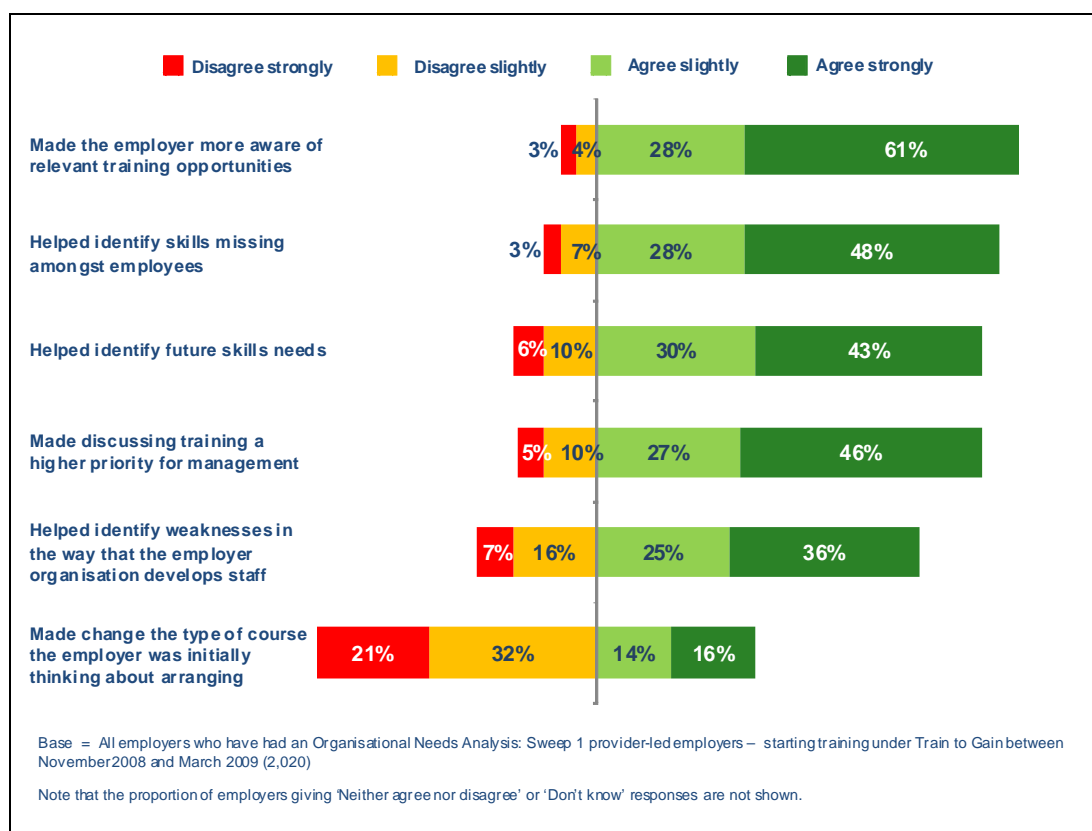
11.44 Sweep 1 provider-led employers were also asked about the impact Train to Gain had had on their business and the benefits they had found. On the whole

provider-led employers were slightly more positive than broker-led employers, but they tended to see similar benefits to their business.

11.45 Just over half (54 per cent) of Sweep 1 provider-led employers reported that they had discussed in detail their skills and training needs with their training provider, receiving some form of Organisational Needs Analysis or Skills Needs Assessment from their provider in advance of taking up Train to Gain training with that provider. These provider-led employers were very likely to say that this advice and guidance had made them more aware of relevant training opportunities, with nine in ten (89 per cent) agreeing with this statement (see Figure 41). As seen amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had received an ONA, this was the area in which the greatest proportion of employers felt the ONA had had an impact.

11.46 There was a significant difference in the views of provider-led employer views on the effectiveness of the advice in helping them identify skills currently missing from their workforce; three quarters of provider-led employers (76 per cent) agreed it had helped with this, compared to just 56 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers. As with Sweep 5 broker-led employers, the assessment was least effective at helping the employer identify the weaknesses in the way they develop staff, with just three fifths (61 per cent) agreeing. Figure 37 shows the agreement ratings given by the Sweep 1 provider-led employers.

Figure 37: Impact of training and skills needs assessments for Sweep 1 Provider-led Employers



11.47 In around one in three cases (31 per cent), the employer agreed that the discussions they had had with the provider as part of the ONA had led to them considering different types of training for staff. The large proportion of employers who disagreed with this (53 per cent) does suggest, however, that these employers are in general approaching their training provider with a pre-identified need for training, rather than for guidance on what type of training would be appropriate.

11.48 The Sweep 1 provider-led survey included questions on the impact that training accessed through Train to Gain has had on employee skill levels and the performance of the organisation as a whole. These are benefits gained in the short term, as reported by provider-led employers between two and nine months after the start of training. It should be noted that whilst comparisons are made here with Sweep 5 broker-led employers who had taken up training, the provider-led cohort are likely to have on average started training earlier, and there may be more likely to have experienced benefits. This is because the provider-led employers had staff start training between November 2008 and March 2009, whereas these dates are when Sweep 5 broker-led employers had just their initial contact with the skills brokerage service.

11.49 Perhaps reflecting this time differential, in terms of short-term benefits to the business, Sweep 1 provider-led employers are more likely to see the benefits than Sweep 5 broker-led employers. The difference is only small for most impacts measured, although as shown in Table 20, in most cases the difference is statistically significant. The difference between the two cohorts is much more marked in relation to the proportion agreeing that the training has helped them to meet their legal requirement to train staff (75 per cent, compared with 58 per cent of Sweep 5 broker-led employers) and in employees gaining qualifications (75 per cent compared with 56 per cent of broker-led employers). As suggested earlier in the report, this adds to a picture of provider-led employers being more likely to be coming to Train to Gain with a specific identified need for training and qualifications. It should be noted that whilst a high proportion say that the training has enabled them to meet a legal requirement, the vast majority also say that there has been real added value in terms of employee skill levels and performance, and a measurable impact on the day-to-day running of the organisation.

11.50 The effect of Train to Gain training on the four key financial and operational benefits of increased staff productivity, product or service quality, sales and turnover and overall profitability is very similar for provider-led employers as it is for broker-led employers, with no significant differences in the proportions saying it has led to an increase or a decrease. Once again the proportion of employers saying that Train to Gain has had a negative effect in these areas was just one per cent for each.

Table 20: Business benefits of Train to Gain in the short-term – differences between Sweep 5 broker-led employers and Sweep 1 provider-led employers

	Employer cohort	
	Sweep 5 broker-led employers	Sweep 1 provider-led employers
Base: All employers taking up training through Train to Gain	1,704	3,750
	%	%
Improved self confidence	83	85
Improved company culture by demonstrating interest in staff development	81	83*
Employees have gained job-related skills and become better at their jobs	79	80
Improved the day-to-day running of the organisation	71	71
Helped long term competitiveness	69	70
Improved business strategy and strategic thinking	66	65
Enabled employer to meet a legal requirement to train staff	58	75*
Employees have gained qualifications	56	75*
Helped improve staff retention and stopped staff leaving	43	52*
Helped the employer to attract and recruit good staff	34	47*
Enabled the employer to provide new services and products	28	35*
Led to a reduction in absenteeism	20	29*
‘**’ = difference between the two groups is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level		

11.51 In the short term, over a third (37 per cent) of provider-led employers felt that Train to Gain had helped their business cope with the economic downturn and financial crisis. This was slightly fewer than for Sweep 5 broker-led employers (41 per

cent), which may reflect the fact that more provider-led employers seem to be undertaking Train to Gain training to meet legislative requirements. Three fifths (61 per cent) felt that Train to Gain had helped put their business in a position to capitalise on any opportunities an economic upturn may present, again slightly less than amongst Sweep 5 broker-led employers (66 per cent).

12 Conclusions and key messages

- 12.1 In conclusion, the Employer Evaluation has highlighted the level of success that has been achieved in meeting the objectives of the Train to Gain service. Even as the service has expanded and encompassed a wider variety of employers, there has been continued high performance across both skills brokerage organisations and training providers in encouraging employers to engage with training and development activity. This training has been, in most cases, more wide ranging and/or of higher quality than that which employers would have undertaken otherwise. Train to Gain has enabled employers to offer additional training for staff at Level 2 that would have been unlikely to have been achieved in the absence of the intervention.
- 12.2 Employers surveyed in summer 2009, report that the advice and guidance they have received through Train to Gain (from both skills brokers and training providers) has been helpful in increasing their awareness of their organisations skills needs and in how to address them, and employers show a high degree of satisfaction with the skills brokerage service. Whilst there has been a decline in employer satisfaction with several aspects of the skills brokerage service in the latest sweep of the evaluation, the overall picture remains positive. The importance that employers who have used the skills brokerage service place on the industry-specific expertise of the skills broker and their understanding of their organisations needs and priorities should be borne in mind as the new integrated brokerage model continues to develop.
- 12.3 The training employers have accessed through Train to Gain has been highly responsive to their needs. Employer satisfaction with the relevance, quality and flexibility of training has been high, and the majority of employers report that the training has led to improvements in employee skills, productivity and commitment to the organisation. In the longer-term, employers continue to train and see further benefits in terms of financial performance.
- 12.4 These positive employer experiences and organisational benefits gained from engagement with the skills brokerage service are matched where employers take up Train to Gain training directly with a training provider. The evaluation shows that these employers are receiving useful advice that looks at all of the organisations skills needs. Only a small minority reported that there were some training needs that were not met by the provider and where the provider did not try to help them with an alternative solution. The evaluation indicates that on the whole, contracted Train to Gain training providers are providing a comprehensive employer-responsive service, encompassing effective advice and guidance prior to the start of training. In summing up the contribution of training providers within Train to

Gain, however, it should be noted that this evaluation did not cover those employers who were in touch with a training provider about the Train to Gain service, but did not end up accessing training.

- 12.5 These latest findings on the benefits of Train to Gain continue to reflect the findings of previous sweeps. However, there are also some other themes emerging more strongly in this latest research. These represent key areas for consideration in the context of the evolving Train to Gain service and the continuing economic recession.
- 12.6 A key theme is the increasing priority of funding in employer decisions about training. Findings from the latest broker-led evaluation sweep and the provider-led employer cohort reveal an increasing proportion of employers being attracted to Train to Gain because of the availability for subsidies for training. The ability of the skills broker or training provider to identify financial support for training activity has become a more important driver of employer satisfaction, with dissatisfaction with the Train to Gain service more often attributed to the expected level of financial support not being available. A greater proportion of those employers deciding not to take up training through Train to Gain are attributing this to the cost to their organisation.
- 12.7 Whilst most employers state that training expenditure has been maintained despite the economic downturn, it would seem that many employers are looking to the financial support available through Train to Gain to develop their training further in the recession. Approaching half of both broker-led and provider-led employers who had received full subsidies for training said that they would not have undertaken this training without this financial support. Even where employers did report that they would have been likely to arrange similar training in the absence of Train to Gain, the support available through Train to Gain has been important in allowing them to train additional staff or access a higher level or quality of training as a result of the service.
- 12.8 There is also a lot of enthusiasm amongst eligible employers for the 'bite sized' learning package for SMEs and for the contribution to wage costs offer, even if general awareness and take up is quite low.
- 12.9 Given the demand for financial support and subsidised training from employers, and in light of the budgetary restrictions within Train to Gain, it will be important to consider how resources can be best managed whilst maintaining the overall contribution the service is making. The findings of the Employer Evaluation suggest several ways in which the impact of the service might be maximised.
- 12.10 The evaluation work has revealed a persistent minority of employers who would have been likely to undertake similar training in the absence of the Train to Gain intervention, and can perhaps therefore be considered as 'deadweight' in the

system. The high proportion of employers taking up training through Train to Gain who have a recent history of arranging training for staff suggests that the service could be targeting support more effectively towards employers with less ability to train employees and a less developed training strategy. The fact that the eligibility model for Train to Gain funding is based around the learner (through the Level 2 entitlement) rather than means testing of the employer's ability to finance training will restrict the extent to which this selectivity can be implemented, however. It is encouraging that the smallest employers, who are arguably more in need of support, were found in Sweep 5 to be increasingly represented in the cohort coming through the skills brokerage service, and to be more likely to want to continue their engagement with the service following the initial contact. The evaluation also supports the rationale for a division of labour between the brokerage service, which will reach out to employers more reluctant to train, and training providers, which offer a good service especially to those employers who have already been actively looking to address an identified training need.

12.11 Another factor which could contribute to maximising the impact of the overall Train to Gain service and reducing the existing level of 'deadweight' would be to encourage more employers who have been in contact with the skills brokerage service or a training provider about Train to Gain to invest in training. The latest findings amongst broker-led employers show that there are a substantial proportion who receive advice and guidance on training solutions but then do not go on to actually arrange this training for staff because they are worried about the cost, or because the expected level of subsidies are not available. It would seem that better management of employer expectations of the availability of financial support (as suggested in the Sweep 4 report) can help in this regard. However, both brokers and providers also have a role to play in encouraging employers to make their own investment where full subsidies are not available for the training needed. This can be achieved through presenting the business case for training and indeed encouraging employers to measure this in their own organisation. Reducing the number of employer 'leads' which do not lead to any additional change in employer training strategy will mean skills brokers and training provider staff ensuring that training solutions proffered are well matched to employer needs, and in ensuring that once employers have been in contact with the service, they are actively followed up and encouraged to move staff into training. Indeed cases where there has been a drop-off in contact with the provider or skills broker following the initial contact about what Train to Gain can offer, and cases where there has been a failure to carry out the follow-up actions needed to make training a reality, have been associated with dissatisfaction across the evaluation. Conversely, on-going dialogue between the skills broker and employer over the long-term is associated with a higher rate of engagement with further training.

12.12 Encouraging employers to make their own investment in training activity is not an unrealistic ambition; even given the current economic climate, the

proportion of employers in contact with the skills brokerage service who went on to make a contribution to funding additional training has increased in Sweep 5.

12.13 Increasing the additional value of the Train to Gain service also relies on making sure that the training that employers do access has the optimum level of impact on their organisation. Whilst increases in sales and turnover and profit margins as a direct result of training emerge for around one quarter of broker-led employers over the longer-term, there is scope here for training to make an even greater impact. This means ensuring that the training is bespoke to the employer and has a clearly defined business case. Both providers and skills brokers have a role to play in helping employers assess the impact of training on an on-going basis, to ensure continuing relevance. It is also important that they focus on understanding the objectives of the employer in training in the context of their specific sector. The Train to Gain Sector Compacts are aiming to ensure that the training funded through Train to Gain meets the priority skills needs in key sectors - the contribution these make to the overall impact on employers in that sector should be monitored going forward.

12.14 A final area for consideration relates to the positioning of the expanded support offer within Train to Gain, including the offers of contributions to wage costs and bite-size training packages. The messages on these offers do not seem to have made a substantial impact on the employers in contact with Train to Gain in late 2008/early 2009 – few say that these influenced their decision to get involved with the service. At the same time, there is demand for these kinds of support. Therefore the decision needs to be taken whether efforts should be made to increase employer awareness, given that this would be likely to lead to substantial increases in demand that may not be able to be met.

Annex A: Methodological Details

This appendix provides more detail on the strategies for the sampling of employers and the weighting of survey data used in the employer evaluation.

Sampling employers and applying quotas: new user broker-led employer sweeps

The basis for the survey sample for Sweep 1 to 5 of the new user broker-led evaluation were the contact details of 94,585 employers supplied by skills brokerage organisations to IFF Research. This figure represents the population of all employers for whom the initial contact with the skills brokerage service came during the period from January 2007 to March 2000. Approximately 57,000 employer records were selected at random for use in the employer evaluation (while the rest formed the sample for the monthly satisfaction monitor research conducted by IFF Research). From these, a total of 18,988 employers were interviewed across the five new user broker-led employer sweeps, meaning that around a third of the available sample was interviewed, sampled on the basis of regional quotas.

Quota targets for interviews were set by region for each new user broker-led employer sweep. The quota system was designed to ensure a sufficient base number of interviews in each region for each sweep, to allow robust region-based analysis of the data. This also took into account the representation of each region in the employer sample population, as provided by the skills brokerages.

For each new user broker-led employer sweep, the quota targets for the regions were calculated as follows: each of the nine regions in England was allocated 200 interviews, while the remaining interviews, up to the initial target of 3,750, were distributed in proportion to the regional profile of the sample population provided by the skills brokerages. In New User Sweep 2, extra 'boost' interviews were conducted in the East Midlands region, bringing the total interviews achieved to 3,976.

Weighting: new user broker-led employer sweeps

After completing the fieldwork, regional weights were applied to the data from each of the new user sweeps to ensure that the results reflected the regional sample populations at the analysis stage. Table B.1 shows a comparison of the unweighted (or 'raw') regional profile of interviews against the weighted regional profile, for all new user sweeps combined. The table also gives the confidence intervals associated with the sample of employers within each region. Where results are presented for all employers, on a finding of 50 per cent we can be 95 per cent confident that the true figure lies within 0.3 per cent of the survey findings.

Table B.1: The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the employer population – New user broker-led employer Sweeps 1 to 5

Region	Number of interviews	% of interviews	% of population (% after weighting applied)	Confidence intervals on a finding of 50%
North East	1,187	6.3	8.4	+/- 2.8%
North West	1,916	10.1	8.2	+/- 2.2%
East Midlands	2,200	11.6	9.1	+/- 2.1%
West Midlands	2,377	12.5	14.3	+/- 2.0%
East of England	2,437	12.8	14.8	+/- 2.0%
South East	2,264	11.9	11.6	+/- 2.1%
South West	2,414	12.7	13.5	+/- 2.0%
Yorkshire and the Humber	2,071	10.9	10.0	+/- 2.2%
London	2,122	11.2	10.1	+/- 2.1%
Total	18,988	100.0	100.0	+/- 0.3%

As a note, the total number of interviews conducted in the North East was substantially lower than for other regions because of the smaller starting sample for this region. The original sample of employers was randomly split, in order to allow the skills brokerage service in the region to conduct its own programme of research. The data has, however, been weighted to the full population of employer contacts from the January 2007 to March 2009 period.

As this report focuses on Sweep 5 of the research, Table B.1A replicates the regional data for the Sweep 5 new user broker-led employer survey alone.

Table B.1A: The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the employer population – New Users Sweep 4

Region	Number of interviews	% of interviews	% of population (% after weighting applied)	Confidence intervals on a finding of 50%
North East	296	7.9	11.0	+/- 5.7%
North West	471	12.6	10.2	+/- 4.5%
East Midlands	269	7.2	5.2	+/- 6.0%
West Midlands	256	6.8	6.6	+/- 6.1%
East of England	454	12.1	17.3	+/- 4.6%
South East	502	13.4	12.6	+/- 4.4%
South West	462	12.3	9.7	+/- 4.6%
Yorkshire and the Humber	464	12.4	11.4	+/- 4.5%
London	576	15.4	15.9	+/- 4.1%
Total	3,750	100	100	+/- 1.6%

Sampling broker-led employers: longitudinal surveys

The starting samples for Longitudinal Surveys were all employers who stated that they would be willing to be recontacted with regard to the ongoing evaluation of Train to Gain at the end of the respective new user broker-led survey sweeps. So, the sample for Longitudinal Survey 3 was comprised of new user broker-led employers who gave their consent to be recontacted after their first interview at Sweep 3. As Table B.2 shows, around three-fifths of these employers completed an interview as part of one of the longitudinal surveys, a year after the initial interview.

Table B.2: Achieved longitudinal survey interviews as a proportion of employers previously agreeing to ongoing involvement in the employer evaluation

	Evaluation element		
	Longitudinal Survey 1	Longitudinal Survey 2	Longitudinal Survey 3
Number of employers interviewed in relevant new user sweep	3,759	3,976	3,753
Number of employers agreeing to ongoing involvement in the evaluation – starting sample	2,863	3,025	2,761
Number of employers re-interviewed	1,685	1,906	1,530
% of starting sample re-interviewed	59	63	55

Weighting: longitudinal broker-led surveys

Regional weights were applied to the data from each of the longitudinal surveys, in order to ensure that the results reflected the regional sample populations for all broker-led employers initially in contact with the skills brokerage service in the sampling period (January to April 2007 for Longitudinal Survey 1; May to October 2007 for Longitudinal Survey 2; and November 2007 to April 2008 for Longitudinal Survey 3). Tables B.3, B.4 and B5 show comparisons of the un-weighted and the weighted regional profiles for Longitudinal Surveys 1, 2 and 3.

Table B.3: The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Longitudinal Survey 1

Region	Number of interviews	% of interviews	% of population (% after weighting applied)
North East	152	9.0	7.2
North West	129	7.7	7.3
East Midlands	138	8.2	6.6
West Midlands	358	21.2	28.0
East of England	209	12.4	13.1
South East	248	14.7	16.9
South West	197	11.7	9.7
Yorkshire and the Humber	130	7.7	3.8
London	124	7.4	7.3

Table B.4: The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Longitudinal Survey 2

Region	Number of interviews	% of interviews	% of population (% after weighting applied)
North East	94	4.9	8.9
North West	187	9.8	8.4
East Midlands	361	18.9	11.6
West Midlands	189	9.9	10.9
East of England	214	11.2	10.8
South East	194	10.2	9.9
South West	279	14.6	16.8
Yorkshire and the Humber	243	12.7	15.1
London	145	7.6	7.8

Table B.5: The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Longitudinal Survey 3

Region	Number of interviews	% of interviews	% of population (% after weighting applied)
North East	25	1.6	6.5
North West	142	9.3	5.9
East Midlands	175	11.4	11.1
West Midlands	196	12.8	14.4
East of England	221	14.4	12.6
South East	194	12.7	9.5
South West	243	15.9	20.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	173	11.3	9.1
London	161	10.5	10.9

Sampling employers and applying quotas: new user provider-led employers

Employer contact details for the provider-led survey sample were derived from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). The total population of all employers with a non-brokered learner start, i.e. who arranged training under Train to Gain without the involvement of a skills broker, recorded on the ILR database for the period November 2008 to March 2009 was 56,764. A randomly selected starting sample comprising 16,946 provider-led employers was supplied to IFF Research. From these, a total of 3,750 employers were interviewed.

For Sweep 1 of the provider-led employer evaluation quota targets were specified to ensure a large enough number of interviews achieved for each region and to allow a robust regional analysis of the data. The quota targets for the provider-led survey were calculated in the same way as for the new user broker-led survey, whereby each region was allocated 200 interviews and the remainder up to the overall target of 3,750 interviews was allocated in proportion to the regional profile of the sample population.

Weighting: new user provider-led employers

At the analysis stage, regional weights were applied to the survey results in order to ensure the data properly reflects the total regional employer distribution. Table B.6 presents the unweighted regional profile of achieved interviews against the weighted weighted profile as observed in the total population.

Table B.6: The regional profile of interviews achieved and of the population of employers – Sweep 1 of the provider-led employer survey

Region	Number of interviews	% of interviews	% of population (after weighting applied)	Confidence intervals on a finding of 50%
North East	299	8.0	6.2	+/- 5.7%
North West	575	15.3	15.9	+/- 4.1%
East Midlands	467	12.5	11.5	+/- 4.5%
West Midlands	551	14.7	15.2	+/- 4.2%
East of England	308	8.2	7.9	+/- 5.6%
South East	494	13.2	14.5	+/- 4.4%
South West	379	10.1	9.2	+/- 5.0%
Yorkshire and the Humber	377	10.1	9.8	+/- 5.0%
London	300	8.0	9.8	+/- 5.7%
Total	3,750	100.0	100.0	+/- 1.6%

Weighting: combined broker-led and provider-led employer findings

Combined broker-led employer and provider-led employer findings are shown in this report for the profile of employers engaged with Train to Gain, satisfaction with skills advisory services and satisfaction with training, and for additionality.

In these cases, the data has been weighted so that the combined finding reflects the incidence of broker-led and provider-led employers in the relevant combined population.

For the profile findings, this means weighting to a population including the full broker-led employer population initially in contact with the skills brokerage service Nov 08 to Mar 09 (17,431) and the full provider-led employer population (56,764). Therefore the broker-led contacts represent 23 per cent of the weighted data.

For the combined satisfaction and additionality findings, the weighting population includes the weighted total of broker-led employers engaging with training (7,923) and the full provider-led employer population (56,764). Therefore the broker-led contacts represent 12 per cent of the weighted data. Note that the combined score should not be taken as a fully comprehensive indication of the impact of the Train to Gain service,

excluding as it does the employers who did not engage in any training activity following contact with the skills brokerage service with regard to Train to Gain.

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Endnotes

¹ Other research studies confirm this positive assessment of the early performance of the skills brokerage service within Train to Gain. For example, the Adult Learner Inspectorate reported in April 2007 that “most employers are highly satisfied with the service.” (ALI, 2007, p.9). Skills brokers were found to be highly skilled and effective at working with employers, giving clear and comprehensive advice about training solutions and funding options. They were considered to be “good ambassadors for training”. However, the survey reported that many skills brokers did not know enough about the skills needs of workers in particular sectors or about specific training courses or qualifications that could meet these needs. One of the challenges, therefore, was to enhance the depth of the skills needs analysis carried out by skills brokers.

¹ By way of comparison, the latest Education and Skills survey published by the CBI found that UK companies are primarily focused on strategies to help them come through the downturn. Improving productivity and performance was the top strategic priority for 61 per cent of businesses, while raising the workforce skills was a key priority for a quarter (24 per cent). See: CBI (2009) *‘Emerging stronger: the value of education and skills in turbulent times’* April 2009.

¹ As a note, the survey did not assess the actual volumes of expenditure; therefore, it could be that the group of employers who have reported a static or increasing level of expenditure started from a low level of investment.

¹ These findings are comparable to the recent Skills Survey published by the CBI, which found that one in ten (9 per cent) of employers surveyed in November 2008 were planning to reduce investment in training in response to the economic downturn. At the same time, the majority of companies (51%) said they would be targeting their training more effectively. See: CBI (2009) *‘Emerging stronger: the value of education and skills in turbulent times’* April 2009. A recent CIPD survey among HR professionals found that around half (51 per cent) of respondents felt that funds for development and learning have stayed the same for the past year. However, a third (32 per cent) stated that training funds have decreased. See: CIPD (2009) *Learning and development. Annual survey report*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

¹ A recent report published by the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils provides further detailed analysis of the impact of the recession in each industry sector of the UK economy. The Financial Services and the Construction sectors were reported to have been among the hardest hit sectors by the recession, which has also impacted significantly on employers within the footprint of the Improve SSC (Food & Drink Manufacturing), Proskills (Process and Manufacturing), and SEMTA SSC (Science, Engineering, and Technology Manufacturing). Overall, the Alliance of SSCs reported a general reduction in employers’ commitment to training across the individual sectors. Many businesses have reduced their training budgets as part of wider cost-cutting measures, while focusing on mandatory training only and redirecting training budgets to be used elsewhere in the business. See: Alliance SSC (2009) *‘The impact of the economic downturn on business and skills in England’* May 2009.

¹ For comparison, see the latest CIPD survey, which found HR professionals to be fairly optimistic about future training expenditure, with just under half (45 per cent) of the respondents agreeing that learning and development funds will remain the same for the next 12 months. See: CIPD (2009) *Learning and development. Annual survey report*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

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