

# The impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment

A review to follow up the 2007/08 survey

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In 2007/08, Ofsted conducted a survey to determine the impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment. This review, of a further 40 providers, identifies where strengths in Train to Gain provision have been sustained and what further improvements are needed. It identifies as key priorities for improvement the proportion of employees who complete their qualifications within the planned duration of their programmes, the availability of Skills for Life training, and the opportunities to progress to higher-level training, especially towards qualifications at level three.

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

T: 08456 404040  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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## Executive summary

This desk-top review follows on from Ofsted's survey of Train to Gain in 2007/08.<sup>1</sup> Evidence was collected from inspections of 40 Train to Gain providers carried out between September 2008 and March 2009. The lead inspectors each responded to a questionnaire based on findings from the 2007/08 survey. These responses were analysed alongside the 40 inspection reports.

The review found the 40 providers had similar strengths to those identified in the 2007/08 survey. Train to Gain continues to improve employees' knowledge and understanding, as well as their motivation and self-esteem. Some aspects of provision were improved, such as the development of employees' technical and practical skills and the involvement of employers in their employees' training. However, some areas continue to require improvement, particularly the provision of Skills for Life training; the timeliness with which employees complete their qualifications; and the opportunities to progress to higher-level training.

The provision of Skills for Life was a key area identified in the 2007/08 survey as needing improvement, and it remains so. This review found that only 13 of the 40 providers offered effective Skills for Life provision that either led to a stand-alone qualification or helped employees to achieve a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). In over half the provision reviewed, insufficient specialist training in Skills for Life was available to employers or taken up when offered to employers and employees.

The programmes reviewed in 2008/09 were effective in raising qualification levels among the workforce and the providers inspected were particularly successful in improving employees' technical and practical skills. However, as was found in the 2007/08 survey, unless employees were working in supervisory posts, it remained difficult for them, once they had completed their initial awards, to progress to higher-level qualifications, including at level three.

Some strengths previously identified in 2007/08 were found again in this review, in particular the effectiveness of the programmes in meeting the needs and interests of employers. Employers were often impressed by providers' responsiveness and flexibility in making arrangements for training and assessment. Many providers had also expanded the range of qualifications and training they offered.

Employers valued the additional skills gained by their employees and could identify business benefits as a result of participation in the programme. However, regulatory requirements remained a key driver for participation. Over half the provision inspected in 2008/09 was in health and social care or construction, sectors where there are legislative or industry requirements for training. Although many employers

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<sup>1</sup> *The impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment (070250)*, Ofsted, 2008.

met the 'hard to reach' criteria, they already had an identifiable commitment to train and develop their staff.<sup>2</sup> The 2007/08 survey found that recruitment to Train to Gain via the skills brokerage service was poor.<sup>3</sup> This remains an area for improvement in this 2008/09 review.

Providers' use of data and methods for calculating success rates were found to be areas in need of improvement in the 2007/08 survey. The 2008/09 review found that most of the providers could provide data to enable calculations to be made of overall and timely success rates, but only half used these data routinely to monitor the progress that employees made.<sup>4</sup> Although overall success rates were high in well over half of the 40 providers, timely success rates were often low. Where timely success rates were low, it was often the result of poor development and use of individual learning plans or of ineffective progress reviews and target-setting for employees. In these examples, assessment remained led by assessors rather than being planned or demanded by employees.

Eligibility criteria for provision funded by Train to Gain were revised prior to publication of the previous survey report; they have changed further since then to enable a wider range of employees, self-employed people and voluntary workers to participate.<sup>5</sup> The 2008/09 review found that these revisions were successful in helping providers to meet the needs of businesses more effectively.

## Key findings

- Employees made good gains in their personal skills, knowledge and understanding as a result of participation in Train to Gain provision.
- Programmes were successful in raising qualification levels among the workforce.
- In over half the provision examined as part of this review, the Skills for Life training available to employees was insufficient.
- Too few employees were able to progress to more advanced training and higher-level qualifications, including at level 3.
- Too few employees gained their qualifications before the planned end date for their programme.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Hard to reach' employers are defined by the Learning and Skills Council as those without Investors in People recognition which have not accessed substantial vocational training leading to a qualification within the past 12 months.

<sup>3</sup> The Brokerage Service provides a range of business support services to employers including diagnosis of workforce skill needs and referral to training provision.

<sup>4</sup> Overall success rates measure the proportion of employees leaving the programme with their intended qualification in any given year. Timely success rates measure the proportion of employees in any given year who gain their intended qualification before the planned end date for their programme or within six weeks of that date.

<sup>5</sup> Eligibility criteria for provision funded by Train to Gain were aimed, initially and in the main, at enabling employees without a level 2 qualification to gain a full qualification in a vocational area or in Skills for Life.

- Employers were highly satisfied with the provision and could identify business benefits through participation in the programme.
- The direct involvement of employers and supervisors in the programme, including in assessment, was a key factor in employees' success.
- Where employees' progress was poor, individual learning plans, target-setting and reviews were ineffective and providers made insufficient use of data to monitor employees' progress.
- Eight of the 15 providers with low timely success rates had no previous experience of offering NVQs via work-based learning.
- Participation in the Train to Gain provision examined for this review was predominantly by employers in those sectors with legislative or established industry requirements for training.
- The level of recruitment to Train to Gain via the skills brokerage service was low in the provision reviewed.

## Recommendations

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should:

- focus on improving the uptake and quality of Skills for Life training provided through Train to Gain
- continue to develop eligibility criteria to enable employees to progress to higher-level awards, including at level 3 where that is appropriate
- establish consistent approaches to capture data on employees' success and progress
- review the effectiveness and role of the skills brokerage service in the delivery of Train to Gain
- prioritise sectors to ensure that those in most need of publicly funded training are targeted for provision.

The Learning and Skills Council and its successor bodies should:

- revise definitions of 'hard to reach' employers to improve the engagement of employers who have not previously considered training as a business strategy
- continue to develop mechanisms for those employees made redundant and unable to continue on the programme to resume their studies once they are re-employed
- ensure that providers new to provision of NVQs via work-based learning have adequate systems in place for their timely delivery.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service should:

- disseminate good practice and provide guidance on the initial assessment of employees' needs, the development and use of individual learning plans, employees' progress reviews and target-setting for employees.

Providers should:

- improve their offer of Skills for Life training and qualifications, and develop their staff accordingly
- work with employers and employees to improve the take-up of training in Skills for Life
- extend their offer of level 3 training and qualifications, and develop their progression routes for learners accordingly
- improve the use of individual learning plans, progress reviews and target-setting to help employees make better progress.

## Skills development and achievement

1. Ofsted's 2007/08 survey on Train to Gain found that almost all the employees interviewed improved their knowledge, understanding, motivation, teamwork, self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of participating in the programme.
2. The 2008/09 review found this strength had been sustained. In all but one of the 40 providers reviewed, employees made good gains in their personal skills, knowledge and understanding. The successful acquisition of personal and workplace skills was particularly strong in over a third of the inspection reports analysed.
3. Employees' attitudes changed to a positive, 'can-do' approach or an improved ability to take initiative, as their confidence increased and their ability to do their jobs improved. These improvements were sometimes substantial. Improvements to employees' work-related knowledge and understanding also featured strongly in inspectors' findings. For example, employers in the care sector reported improved standards of care and a stronger professional ethos. Participation in Train to Gain provided employees with opportunities to study working practices in detail, thus extending their knowledge and understanding of their work roles and the contributions they made. Literacy qualifications were shown to have particular benefits at work. For example, they enabled support workers in the voluntary sector to assist their clients more effectively.
4. The 2007/08 survey found that programmes were effective in raising qualification levels among the workforce. However, they did not have a substantial impact on employees' technical or practical skills unless they progressed to work and training at level 3.

5. The 2008/09 review found that programmes funded by Train to Gain remained successful in raising qualification levels among the workforce. Employees who embarked on a Train to Gain programme generally completed it and gained the qualification. Providers were better at improving employees' technical and practical skills than was found in the 2007/08 visits. Thirty four of the responses from lead inspectors to the questionnaire reported good improvements in employees' technical skills as a result of participation; the development of these skills was particularly strong in a quarter of the 40 providers reviewed.
6. Most of the employees participating in the training covered by these inspections, as in the previous survey, had little or no history of training or of prior qualifications. However, employees were only rarely able to progress to higher qualification levels, even if they were motivated to do so. One employer offered progression to level 3 on completion of the level 2 qualification, but this was not the norm in the provision reviewed.
7. The provision remained too dependent on the competence-based nature of the qualifications available and thus on the support of employers and the employment opportunities they were able to provide. Employees encountered barriers to higher-level learning where their current work roles did not provide them with sufficient opportunities to develop or demonstrate the skills associated with higher-level qualifications.
8. Around three quarters of the providers contributing data to the 2007/08 survey reported qualification success rates of over 70% for employees on Train to Gain programmes. However, the methods used for calculating success rates varied.
9. The 2008/09 review found that providers' use of overall and timely success rates for monitoring performance was still not well-established. Although nearly all the providers supplied Ofsted with data to calculate overall and timely success rates for their inspections, only half of these providers routinely used overall and timely success rates to monitor their own provision.
10. Overall success rates, which measure the proportion of those employees leaving the programme with their intended qualification in any given year, remain high, and are a positive feature of Train to Gain. For example, of the 31 providers investigated for this review and with Train to Gain data for 2007/08, 21 had overall success rates of 80% or more. Ten of these 21 had overall success rates in 2007/08 of over 90%. Only two providers had overall success rates below 60%. The lowest overall success rate in the sample was 42%; the highest was 99%. Employees are mature, often experienced, well-established in their job roles and have the support of their employers to participate. If they complete the programme, they should gain the qualification: overall success rates should be high.



11. Timely success rates measure the proportion of employees within any given year who gain their intended qualification before the planned end date for their programme or within six weeks of that date. In contrast with overall rates, timely success rates for the 31 providers analysed were often low. Fifteen had timely success rates of 60% or below; eight of these had timely success rates below 40%. Although ten providers had timely success rates of 80% or more, three providers in the sample had failed to qualify any employees within the period planned for their programmes.
12. The poor use of individual learning plans, progress reviews and target-setting for employees featured frequently as areas for improvement in the provision reviewed and go some way to explaining the slow progress, and thus the low timely success rates, identified by this review. Learning plans were often weak, or too generic. The providers made insufficient use of initial assessment to identify employees' existing work skills at the start of their programmes and thus to develop learning plans that were matched to an employee's individual needs. Employees were given appropriate training to improve their skills but this was not always tailored to an employee's individual needs. Assessment remained driven by assessors. Where plans were in place, aims and objectives were often designed for a group rather than individualised. Progress reviews were often found to be weak, with poor target-setting to help employees make progress.
13. Twelve of the 40 providers in the 2008/09 review were identified as having no previous experience of providing NVQs via work-based learning. Of the 15 providers where timely success rates were low, eight were providers with no previous experience of providing NVQs via work-based learning, while of the 21 providers with high overall success rates, 19 had previous experience of providing NVQs.

## Skills for Life

14. Skills for Life provision includes support for the development of employees' skills in language, literacy and numeracy. The 2007/08 survey found that insufficient Skills for Life provision was offered by the providers visited or was taken up by employers and employees. Few providers had specialist staff to offer effective Skills for Life training. Providers and employers were reluctant to broach discussions of Skills for Life needs among employees.
15. Nearly two thirds of the lead inspectors contributing to the 2008/09 review agreed that the providers they had inspected offered insufficient Skills for Life provision. However, more providers offered discrete Skills for Life provision, either before employees embarked on their vocational qualification or as a stand-alone qualification than were identified in the 2007/08 survey. In one example, the provider had worked particularly hard to secure take-up; another offered Skills for Life training before delivering the main programme. Where Skills for Life was offered and taken up, its provision was at least satisfactory.

One provider had an overall success rate of 100% on its Skills for Life courses at levels 1 and 2.

16. In the providers reviewed, only 10 had sufficient staff trained to develop employees' Skills for Life. Even where it was available, employers and employees remained reluctant to take up the offer of Skills for Life training. In some instances, inspectors identified barriers to take-up, for example when employees were dispersed over a wide geographical area. However, Skills for Life training was not always offered systematically. If offered, employees were not given sufficient encouragement to take it up. One provider asserted that Skills for Life should not be heavily promoted to adults if they did not want to develop these skills.

## Quality of training and assessment

17. The 2007/08 survey found that over three quarters of the 48 providers visited adopted particularly flexible and responsive arrangements for the training and assessment of employees. They expanded the training methods and qualifications they offered to meet a diverse range of employer needs.
18. All but three of the lead inspectors responding to the questionnaire judged that the providers reviewed in 2008/09 had adopted flexible and responsive arrangements for training and assessment. Much of the flexibility offered was based on arrangements for visits to employers; these were timed to meet employers' and employees' needs. For example, they travelled long distances, out of office hours and at the weekend, to meet employees' needs and shift patterns.
19. Strategies for increasing flexibility and access to provision included e-learning and e-portfolios, and one provider had made effective use of other employees as assessors. Overwhelmingly, however, the strategy for training remained the flexible provision of coaching in the workplace, with some group workshops where possible, and provided at times and locations to meet employees' needs. There were some signs that provision could be too flexible. In one example, flexibility was provided at the expense of planning provision, so that employees were not always aware that they were being assessed.
20. Employers were impressed by providers' responsiveness. In some cases, they were able to influence the range of skills areas delivered by providers. In others, consortium arrangements or collaboration with other providers were used to extend the range of qualifications or training topics available to employees.

## **Involvement of employers and supervisors**

21. Employers or supervisors visited as part of the 2007/08 survey were not sufficiently involved in employees' programmes of training or assessment. Employees were not encouraged to take sufficient responsibility for their own development or assessment nor were they provided with sufficient information to guide their future study.
22. The 2008/09 review found that, in the provision investigated, there was greater involvement of employers in employees' training and assessment. Of the lead inspectors responding to the questionnaire, 26 found that the providers had been effective in involving employers and supervisors in their employees' development and in helping employees to take responsibility for their own learning and assessment. Some good examples stood out. For example, one company allocated a member of the management team to teams of employees to provide support, help monitor their progress and facilitate achievement. In another provider, employers were involved in employees' programmes at a very early stage and engaged in beneficial initial discussions with the provider about the level, content and outcomes of learning. These were adapted where necessary to meet the employers' and employees' needs. Another provider successfully encouraged supervisors to join training sessions for their employees to help them progress. However, in one example, employer involvement was the result of enthusiasm and commitment by employers, rather than part of a planned programme of involvement by providers. The lack of effective individual learning plans meant that supervisors were not always able to provide targeted help to take forward employees' training and assessment.

## **Impact of training**

23. Over three quarters of the employers visited for the 2007/08 survey identified benefits from participation in the programme such as reduced staff turnover, improved working practices or understanding of health and safety.
24. All but one of the lead inspectors responding to the 2008/09 questionnaire could identify benefits to employers as a result of their participation. Employers valued their employees' additional skills. Particular benefits included improved health and safety practices and successful tendering for contracts because of the existence of a qualified workforce. New or revised procedures and working practices in the workplace, leading to more efficient and effective working, featured well in feedback on the impact of provision. At one provider, employers had identified demonstrable financial savings or impact on the 'bottom line'. Others reported benefits such as improved services to customers, reductions in customer complaints and reductions in staff turnover.

## Information, advice and guidance

25. The 2007/08 survey found that employees were given insufficient information about their programmes, the range of provision available or progression routes beyond the qualification they were doing at the time.
26. Nearly three quarters of the lead inspectors responding to the 2008/09 questionnaire found that employees were informed about the different training or progression opportunities that were available to them. However, the provision of this information, advice and guidance was rarely better than satisfactory and did not always provide employees with sufficient information to help them to progress to other training or education.

## Demand for training and the role of the brokerage service

27. Although almost all the employers surveyed in 2007/08 were pleased with the training and assessment their staff had received and were keen to participate, the survey found little evidence that the programme was driving up the demand for training among employers.
28. All but two lead inspectors reported high levels of satisfaction with training provision among employers. This was a key feature of the feedback received from the questionnaires and often featured as a strength of provision in the inspection reports analysed for this review. The 2008/09 review also identified that Train to Gain had driven up demand for training from employers. However, regulatory requirements remained a key driver for participation. Of the 11,000 employees covered by the review, 28% worked in the care sector, where there are statutory requirements for a qualified workforce, and 23% worked in construction, where industry-imposed competency awards, such as the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) or Construction Plant Certification Scheme (CPCS), are drivers for the accreditation of employees. The provision reviewed did not increase employers' willingness to pay for training. In the providers reviewed, only three used the programme to stimulate employers' investment in further training.
29. Eighteen of the providers supplied detailed data on the recruitment of participants on Train to Gain programmes for the 2007/08 survey. These showed that only 5% of participants came from employers who had been referred by the brokerage service. Almost all the employers were committed to training, although they also met the Learning and Skills Council's 'hard to reach' criteria.
30. Nearly two thirds of the lead inspectors in the 2008/09 review identified that employers met 'hard to reach' criteria, even though in all but two responses employers were committed to and enthusiastic about training, suggesting that

the 'hard to reach' criteria were too easily met. Of the lead inspectors responding to the survey, 30 reported that few employees recruited to Train to Gain had been referred by the brokerage service. Of the three providers who provided inspection teams with numerical data on referrals, 5% was the highest proportion of learners recruited by brokers.

31. Eligibility criteria were a barrier to participation for around half of the employers in the 2007/08 survey. It found that the criteria for funding Train to Gain programmes did not allow sufficient access to provision for employees who already had a level 2 qualification but in an area unrelated to their current work or the criteria focused too narrowly on the completion of a full award.
32. In the 2008/09 review, all but one lead inspector reported that revisions to the eligibility criteria were effective in helping providers to meet employers' needs. This, in turn, reinforced the responsiveness of the providers to employers (see above). Access to level 3 and some level 4 qualifications had proved helpful in enabling employees to access provision and provide for progression. The increased flexibility had also provided a platform for providers to revisit employers. Despite these improvements in access, some employers still found the full NVQ 2 a barrier to participation and wanted smaller qualifications. This, however, should be balanced by the benefits that came from full level 2 achievement for employees.

## Consortia

33. The 2007/08 survey found that, unless well-established, membership of a consortium added little value to the delivery of provision and increased levels of bureaucracy for providers.
34. Three of the 40 providers in the 2008/09 review were consortia leads or members; a fourth provider was a lead for two consortia. Five other providers worked with subcontractors to provide Train to Gain programmes. The lead inspectors responding to the questionnaire presented a mixed picture of the benefits, or otherwise, of consortium membership. In general, the benefits of membership depended on the extent and quality of service provided by the consortium lead. In one consortium, partnership arrangements had been beneficial and meetings between partners had helped to share practice and drive up individual members' success rates. In another, the consortium had streamlined recruitment through the skills brokerage service. However, the only benefit reported by a third consortium was that of access to additional funding. The extent to which consortia are effective in promoting and delivering provision remains dependent on the effectiveness of the consortium lead.

## Train to Gain and the Skills Strategy

35. The 2008/09 review explored the extent to which managers in providers saw Train to Gain as part of the Government's strategy for creating demand-led

approaches to training the workforce in line with the Leitch report's recommendations. A mixed picture emerged which largely reflected a view that Train to Gain was seen as a funded programme or 'free training' for employees. Only one provider saw it as a strategy for increasing the demand for training and to improve providers' responsiveness. If Train to Gain provision was part of a local or regional plan for provision to meet the needs of the local economy, this was not clear to providers or made clear to inspectors as forming part of the providers' business or development plans. The providers reviewed made very few links between initiatives such as the skills pledge and Investors in People and Train to Gain, although one provider had, itself, signed the skills pledge.

36. Lead inspectors responding to the 2008/09 questionnaire presented a positive picture of the extent to which providers had expanded the provision they offered to meet the needs of employers. Nearly half of these respondents reported improved access to provision, either through programmes that complemented providers' existing work by expanding the range of qualifications they offered, for example into management, food safety, care, logistics, laundry services, or Skills for Life short courses to complement NVQ provision. Many of these qualifications were in sector skills areas not traditionally offered through apprenticeships or college-based courses. Train to Gain was thus effective in widening participation and promoting inclusion. It also enabled those providers who, up until now, had offered only employer-funded provision to access public funding or helped providers to add to their apprenticeship programmes and offer provision to older employees. Although five providers had made little change to the range of provision offered, in six examples the expansion was reported as substantial.
37. This survey was carried out before the economic downturn had begun to have a significant impact on employment. In those instances where employees' progress had been affected by redundancy or fewer opportunities for training and assessment, providers responded flexibly by helping employees to gain the qualification more quickly or by providing unit accreditation.

## Notes

During the period September 2008 to March 2009, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors analysed the inspection judgements of 118 Train to Gain inspections and 48 reports from inspections that had taken place during the period. They followed up 40 of these inspections in more detail. This was done through a questionnaire completed by the lead inspectors of the latter in order to determine the extent to which the findings of the survey published in 2008 had been maintained. The questionnaire gathered qualitative data on the extent to which current inspection findings matched findings in the 2007/08 survey, sought further comments where appropriate, and asked inspectors to comment on the strategic position of Train to Gain within the provision they were inspecting.

The range of providers selected for follow-up included large and small independent training providers, those offering Train to Gain only and those offering a range of provision, across one sector subject area or several, those working alone and as part of a consortium, and colleges of further education.

## Further information

### Ofsted publications

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

### Publications by others

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

*World class skills: implementing the Leitch review of skills in England*, DIUS, 2007; [www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch.html](http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch.html).

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

*Train to Gain: a plan for growth*, DIUS, 2007; [www.dius.gov.uk/publications/Train-to-Gain-Executive-Summary.pdf](http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/Train-to-Gain-Executive-Summary.pdf).

### Websites

Information about Train to Gain can be found at:

[www.traintogain.gov.uk](http://www.traintogain.gov.uk)

[www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/ttg](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/ttg)

[www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk)