

The impact of Train to Gain on skills in employment

This survey report evaluates the impact of provision funded by Train to Gain on the skills and qualifications held by adult employees in England. Programmes funded by Train to Gain are available for adults who do not hold level 2 qualifications or who have literacy or numeracy skills needs. This survey assessed the extent to which skills were improved, the quality of provision funded by Train to Gain, and the leadership and management of that provision.

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Executive summary

Between September 2007 and April 2008 a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors and Additional Inspectors visited 48 providers of training funded by Train to Gain and interviewed 200 of their staff. They visited 74 employers to interview 104 workplace supervisors and 157 employees on programmes funded by Train to Gain. Inspectors scrutinised documents related to employees' programmes and progress and sampled their portfolios of evidence. They analysed inspection reports for 97 providers of Train to Gain. The providers and reports were selected from the nine Learning and Skills Council (LSC) regions in England and included colleges, work-based learning providers and consortia. The terms 'provision surveyed' and 'employers surveyed' used in the report refer to the evidence gained from visits, interviews and inspection reports.

The survey 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.

The training providers surveyed showed themselves to be adept at responding to the needs of employers. They developed the range of qualifications offered and provided training and assessment frequently and very flexibly to meet employers' and employees' working needs and circumstances. They made timely and effective adaptations to provision to meet the needs of employers. This minimised disruption and improved access to training and accreditation for employers and employees.

Data on qualification success rates were not collected systematically by all the providers. Mechanisms for calculating success rates varied and were not always comparable with those used for other work-based learning programmes. Nevertheless, the data collected from the survey indicate that Train to Gain was successful in improving qualification levels among employees. However, success in this context must take account of the short duration of many programmes, the relative maturity and experience of participating employees and the support they received from their employers. Unless employees were able to progress to work and qualifications at level 3, the provision surveyed did not greatly improve their technical or practical skills.

Areas remain for improvement in the design and delivery of the programme. The provision of skills for life training was a particular weakness. Those employees with language, literacy, or numeracy (skills for life) needs rarely received sufficient training or encouragement to improve their skills. Around a third of the providers surveyed were unclear about the extent to which skills for life provision was eligible for funding through Train to Gain. Few of the providers had sufficient specialist staff to develop, as distinct from support, employees with skills for life needs.

Fewer than one in 10 of the employees surveyed had clear learning plans to show how provision would meet needs identified during any initial assessment of their skills, or to enable them to take greater responsibility for their own development. The employers surveyed were insufficiently involved in the training or assessment of their employees. Although all the providers had developed mechanisms for recording the number of hours of training, they did not always distinguish clearly between assessment and training in these records.

On the evidence of the provision surveyed, the brokerage service had a minimal impact on the number of employees starting a Train to Gain programme, or on the number of genuinely 'hard to reach' employers that were participating. Providers did not make sufficient use of adult information, advice and guidance services. Eligibility criteria or the requirement that a full level 2 or skills for life qualification be awarded did not always meet employers' needs. Contracting requirements for the formation of consortia often did not add value to provision unless those consortia also existed for other purposes.

Almost all the employers surveyed were highly satisfied with the quality of provision and the services they had received through Train to Gain. Three quarters of the providers surveyed had increased the number of employers with whom they worked. However, most employers were participating because of the successful recruitment by providers and because the programme was free of charge. The survey found little evidence that the programme was driving up the demand for training among employers.

Key findings

- Almost all the employees surveyed made improvements to their knowledge, understanding, motivation, teamwork, self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The programmes surveyed were effective in raising qualification levels among the workforce. However, they did not make substantial improvements to employees' technical or practical skills unless they progressed to work and training at level 3.
- Around three quarters of the providers contributing data to the survey reported qualification success rates of over 70% for employees on Train to Gain programmes. However, methods for calculating success rates varied.
- Over three quarters of the providers 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.
- Over three quarters of the employers visited identified benefits such as reduced staff turnover, improved working practices or understanding of health and safety as a result of participation in the programme.
- Insufficient skills for life provision was offered by providers or taken up by employers and employees. Few providers had specialist staff to offer effective skills for life training.

- Employers or supervisors 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.
- The providers surveyed had responded well to the demands posed by Train to Gain and had quickly set up systems for its promotion, delivery and quality assurance.
- Although almost all the employers 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.
- Eighteen providers supplied detailed data on the recruitment of participants on Train to Gain programmes. These showed that only 5% of participants came from employers who had been referred by the brokerage service. Almost all of the employers were committed to training although they also met 'hard to reach' criteria.
- For around half of the employers, the eligibility criteria were a barrier. They did not allow sufficient access to provision for employees who had a level 2 qualification but in an unrelated area, or focused too narrowly on the completion of a full award.
- Unless well established, membership of a consortium added little value to the delivery of provision, and increased levels of bureaucracy for providers.

Recommendations

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills should:

- revisit policy and framework design, and the planned outcomes for the programme, to enable providers to offer programmes leading to higher level technical skills, knowledge and understanding
- explore other mechanisms for providing incentives to employers to drive employer demand for training.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and its agencies should:

- develop and implement strategies for increasing the number of people who are trained and competent to develop skills for life in adults
- develop and implement strategies for increasing uptake in skills for life training with employers
- review the brokerage service and its targets to include targets for successful starts
- strengthen definitions of 'hard to reach' employers.

The LSC should:

- develop funding mechanisms and audit procedures to distinguish clearly between assessment and training to help ensure that at least minimum levels of training are provided
- revise their contracting arrangements to ensure that requirements such as consortium formation add value to the service offered to employers and employees
- establish with other partner organisations an agreed method for calculating Train to Gain success rates.

Providers should:

- develop and implement strategies for promoting skills for life training to employers and for developing skills for life among employees
- make better use of initial assessment to plan training programmes for employees
- involve employees and employers more fully in training and assessment
- provide, or direct employees to, additional information and advice on training and development at the start of, during and on completion of their programmes.

Evaluation

Background

1. As part of its strategy for skills in England in 2005, the Government announced, the introduction of a National Employer Training Programme known as Train to Gain.^{1,2} Its aims are to raise skills levels to help the UK respond to increasing global competition and to help improve social inclusion. Train to Gain offers training and assessment designed for employers and delivered to suit their operational needs, often in the workplace. Business support services, including an advice service on training provision, are provided for employers through a skills brokerage service.
2. A particular target for Train to Gain is that of 'hard to reach' employers. These employers are defined by the LSC as those without Investors in People

¹ *Success for all: reforming further education and training*, DCSF, 2002;
<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/pre2005/research/responses/success-for-all-reforming-further-education-and-training.pdf>.

² *Skills: getting on in business, getting on at work*, DCSF, 2005;
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/>.

recognition which have not accessed substantial vocational training leading to a qualification within the past 12 months.³

3. Train to Gain is offered in all nine LSC regions in England and by the National Employer Service. Contracts for delivery of provision are between the LSC and individual providers or consortia of providers. Many providers have contracts with one or more local LSCs to deliver Train to Gain.
4. Public funding is available to provide
 - free training to enable employees to gain their first full level 2 qualification, and Skills for Life numeracy and literacy qualification
 - wage compensation for companies with fewer than 50 employees
 - funded programmes, including apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships, national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3 and above, and higher education.
5. Two levels of public funding are available for Train to Gain. The lower level of funding provides for employees with few training needs, who can move directly to assessment of their competence at work. The higher level of funding provides for employees who need a minimum of 20 hours of training in order to achieve their qualification aims.
6. This survey evaluated the extent to which employees' skills are developed and employers' needs for skills are met by provision funded through Train to Gain. It also explored the extent to which the design of Train to Gain facilitated the development of skills to meet employers' needs. It followed the three main evaluation themes of the Common Inspection Framework: achievement and standards; the quality of provision; and leadership and management. The start of work on the survey coincided with the publication of the Government's proposals in response to the Leitch Report.^{4,5} They included the expansion of Train to Gain as a key mechanism for delivering employer demand-led approaches to skills development in England. In November 2007 the LSC published *A plan for growth* which outlined further modifications to the programme, a number of which had yet to take effect during the period of the fieldwork.⁶

³ For employers with 50 or more employees, substantial equates to 10% or more of their workforce; for employers with less than 50, substantial equates to 30% or more of their workforce.

⁴ *World class skills: implementing the Leitch review of skills in England*, DIUS, 2007; www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch.html.

⁵ *The Leitch review of skills: prosperity for all in the global economy*, HM Treasury, 2006; www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch_review_skills.htm.

⁶ *Train to gain: a plan for growth*, DIUS, 2007; www.dius.gov.uk/publications/Train-to-Gain-Executive-Summary.pdf.

Findings

Skills development and achievement

7. Well over three quarters of the employees interviewed or whose records were analysed for this survey had little prior history of training or attainment. Provision funded by Train to Gain offered them their first opportunity to gain a qualification since leaving school. The employees were highly satisfied with the training and assessment they had received. They took great pride in the achievement of their qualifications and many were inspired to continue learning and pursue further qualifications. Their achievements often motivated other colleagues at work.
8. The employees surveyed gained greatly in knowledge and understanding as they progressed through their training. They understood why they did things at work, or the theory behind what they do, as a result of working towards their qualifications. For example, employees improved their knowledge of best work practice or of the legislation associated with their work. They had higher levels of health and safety awareness as a result of participation in the programme. In the care sector, employees had a better understanding of the way in which teams work together to provide care for the elderly. Almost all the employees showed improvements in their teamwork, motivation to learn, self-confidence, self-esteem and willingness to learn. Their work was completed more quickly and to a higher standard.
9. Most of the employees on the surveyed provision had been doing their jobs for several years and already had most of the technical or practical skills they needed to perform effectively at work. Gaps in their practical skills, to meet the requirements of qualifications at level 2, were small and needed little development. If the employees were new to their jobs there was greater development of these practical skills. By contrast, employees working towards level 3 qualifications made considerable gains in their practical skills. This development often placed greater demands on employers, who often needed to commit to investment in further training, either by funding it themselves, or providing it in-house. When this progression took place, employees' skills and knowledge improved greatly. However, such gains were available only to those employees who carried out work at level 3 or had the support of their employers to progress to this higher, often supervisory, level.
10. Around three quarters of the providers were able to provide data on success rates. Of these, less than 10% quoted success rates below 60%; several providers pointed to success rates in excess of 95%. These data, should,

however, be viewed with a degree of caution. The LSC reports that in Train to Gain's first full year of operation, national success rates were 60%.⁷

11. The providers visited did not routinely collect and use data based on standardised and comparable methods for calculating success rates. For those providers new to Train to Gain, data were inevitably incomplete because many employees had only recently started their programmes. Comparisons of such success rates with success rates for other types of provision, which use different methods of calculation, are clearly unsound.
12. Even where success rates were validated, judgements on these rates must take account of the relative simplicity and short duration of Train to Gain programmes, and the relatively stable employment status and maturity of the employees who were participating. The former Adult Learning Inspectorate's (ALI) report on the Employer Training Pilot – the precursor of Train to Gain – found similar high success rates but a shortage of reliable data, suggesting that problems associated with data collection and analysis are not yet resolved.⁸
13. Employees generally made satisfactory progress towards completion of their qualifications. Inspection reports showed they completed their programmes successfully and within the agreed timescales. Employees who were retained on their programme tended to complete and gain the qualification.
14. In general, the providers which had prior experience of offering work-based learning or apprenticeships tended to have systems and processes that adapted well to Train to Gain. These systems worked effectively and helped employees make progress. Similarly, those providers with experience of the Employer Training Pilot tended to have been more successful at generating starts and at helping employees to progress. Those who were offering qualifications via work-based learning for the first time often found it more difficult and were slower to organise provision.
15. Progress also varied according to sector. In sectors such as care and customer service, the providers surveyed adapted provision more easily to delivery that was wholly work-based. In others, such as construction or motor vehicle engineering, the providers with less experience of work-based learning found it more difficult to establish programmes based on development and assessment of employees on the job. A few of the providers in areas where take-up was low compared to other regions, such as the South East, had concentrated on

⁷ *Statistical first release: ILR/SFR16*, LSC, 2008; <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-sfr16fullyrplus-da-200607-v1-0.pdf>

⁸ *Employer training pilot survey*, ALI, 2005; www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR695.pdf.

recruiting participants at the expense of setting up systems for the smooth delivery of training and assessment.

Quality of training

16. 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. Providers offered more training as part of programmes funded by Train to Gain than had been the case with the Employer Training Pilot. The better providers often negotiated successfully with employers to ensure that training was integrated well with assessment for the qualification. A small number of the programmes observed led to additional qualifications.
17. A range of teaching and learning strategies was used, including e-learning, workbooks and learning packs, and group and individual sessions. For example, one provider brought employees together in groups for induction and learning sessions. Another offered employees the opportunity to attend monthly off-the-job group training sessions. The larger employers surveyed often had their own in-house training provision, where employees had access to good quality training rooms and resources and to wider learning beyond that required for the NVQ. A small number of providers offered specialised training workshops tailored to meet individual employers' needs. For example one provider offered additional workshops in bomb awareness for cleaners working at an airport. Employees valued the peer learning that occurred with group work. However, training to develop employees' knowledge and understanding was more often individualised and provided by assessors during their visits to employees at work.

Case study

One provider worked closely with a large employer in the hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors to map the employer's training programme and prepared a well-designed workbook for use in providing evidence for the relevant NVQ. During the induction and training programme offered by their employer, employees completed the workbook which was cross-referenced to the knowledge and performance requirements of the NVQ at level 2 in food and drink service. The process was reviewed several times and amended to ensure it met the requirements of both the employer and the NVQ. The employer planned to develop the approach for other sectors of its business.

18. Over three quarters of the providers visited made use of tools such as 'skills scans' to assess the skills of employees at the start of their programme. However, they did not always make sufficient use of these in preparing

individual learning plans for employees. Providers did not make sufficient use of initial assessment of employees' skills and in particular, their skills for life. It was not used to explore their needs in detail or to plan a programme of skills for life development. Most of the individual learning plans examined were audit documents rather than an expression of longer term training or accreditation goals and the means of their achievement. Delivery of training to fill gaps in employees' understanding or work practice was often linked to assessment planning rather than to a learning plan. Thus, in planning assessments, assessors identified gaps in knowledge or skill and arranged training or coaching for individuals to fill those gaps. For employees who were experienced and who had few training needs, this approach enabled them to progress satisfactorily, although it did not always provide them with sufficient opportunity to manage their own training and assessment. For employees with greater training needs, learning plans were not sufficiently detailed.

19. Frequent visits from assessors alleviated some of the problems caused by such learning plans. However, if these visits were disrupted, for example because of staff absence or turnover, employees had insufficient information about the steps they should take to pursue their development independently. In a small number of cases, assessors confused their varied roles and, for example, lapsed into coaching roles during summative assessments.

Information, advice and guidance

20. In the better provision surveyed, employees were involved in agreeing programmes at the sign-up stage. They understood the requirements of the programme, helped make decisions about the qualifications towards which they would work and any optional components these qualifications contained. They knew why they were participating and were keen to do so. However, in too many cases, employees were not given sufficient initial information about the programme. Even where information was available, there was very little guidance on the range of provision available, or about progression routes beyond the immediate qualification offered. More often, employees were told they were going to do the programme, rather than informed and advised about it.
21. The services of nextstep providers were rarely used by the employers or providers surveyed, to determine the needs and wants of individuals. This echoes the findings of the former Adult Learning Inspectorate in its report on the impact of the brokerage service, when poor promotion of adult information and advice services was noted as a weakness.⁹ In some regions, providers had been discouraged from using nextstep within Train to Gain, believing that this

⁹ *The impact of the brokerage service on learners*, ALI, 2006; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Post-16-learning-and-skills/Read-about-this-new-section/The-impact-of-the-brokerage-service-on-learners/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Post-16-learning-and-skills/Read-about-this-new-section/The-impact-of-the-brokerage-service-on-learners/(language)/eng-GB).

would constitute double funding. In other regions, such links were encouraged; nonetheless, too few providers made specific use of the service. Employees were not given sufficient encouragement to make use of information and advice services to explore alternative learning opportunities unrelated to their work. They rarely received any guidance on how they could progress to higher levels, or different areas of study, once they had completed their programmes.

Assessment of skills and competence

22. The assessment of employees' skills and competence for their qualifications was generally good. This reflects improvements in work-based assessment practice that have taken place over the past few years since the former Adult Learning Inspectorate reported on assessment practice in Employer Training Pilots. Assessors planned assessment effectively. They made frequent visits to employees at work and provided good and responsive support to enable employees to achieve their qualifications. They used an appropriate range of assessment methods, including extensive and effective use of direct observation of performance. Assessors were open, accessible and successful in building employees' confidence to participate. They adopted very flexible approaches to try to avoid disrupting the work of employers and sometimes worked unsocial hours or in difficult conditions to capture evidence of employees' competence.

Case study

One provider used provision funded by Train to Gain to build capacity in training provision at a large local employer, the port authority, and to train and assess employees working for the authority. The provider developed four of the authority's staff as trainers and assessors and was working alongside these staff to offer training and assessment in relevant NVQs to other employees working for the authority. The arrangements offered particularly flexible and responsive assessment opportunities to employees. All NVQ assessment and mentoring sessions were individual and held at employees' place of work or in one of the employer's training rooms. Planned assessments were arranged to meet employees' working circumstances and were changed at short notice when these circumstances changed. For example, when a vessel could not dock because of bad weather and the planned assessment activity could not take place at the pre-arranged time, the assessor attended later, during the night, to enable appropriate evidence to be captured. Following the success of the scheme, the employer trained and qualified additional staff to develop and assess other employees in the company.

23. Over three quarters of the assessors visited as part of the survey were very thorough and made careful checks of employees' knowledge and understanding. They provided clear feedback to employees, helping them to think more clearly and improve work practices. They gave employees adequate

information on their progress. The better assessors went to some lengths to reduce the burden of paperwork and portfolio building for employees. Portfolios of evidence were generally of a high standard and included a good variety of evidence. In the best assessment practice, and particularly in level 3 qualifications, employees were helped to take responsibility for their own assessment and to develop their skills in cross-referencing evidence of their competence. However, in weaker examples, assessment was too reliant on the assessor taking the lead in evidence collection.

24. Assessors generally set satisfactory targets for employees. However, their visits to employees were used to agree short term targets for the next visit rather than for longer term planning. Targets were usually specific and helpful in enabling employees to make progress with their training, but only provided information for them on what they should be doing between visits from their assessor. Only rarely were employees set longer-term targets that identified all the steps that employees needed to take to achieve their qualifications within the specified time frame, or that would enable them to take control of their own progress.

Skills for life

25. In the better examples of Train to Gain provision, the providers had developed highly effective strategies for promoting and delivering skills for life. They routinely carried out literacy and numeracy assessments at the start of employees' programmes and used the information to develop appropriate programmes to develop these skills where necessary, often integrating them with delivery of the occupational qualification.

Case study

One vocational training provider had formed a successful partnership with a skills for life provider to promote Train to Gain provision jointly. They visited employers together and offered an integrated package of vocational and skills for life training. They successfully emphasised the business benefits of both vocational and skills for life training to employers and the individual benefits to employees. The collaboration led to good uptake of discrete, vocationally relevant skills for life. Both providers were involved in employees' induction to the programme and attended training sessions. They formed close working relationships and learned good practice from one another.

26. Where skills for life training was provided, it often had a greater impact than achievement of the NVQ alone. All the gains in personal skills, knowledge and understanding were enhanced by good skills for life training. In one example, a provider was working with a small group of employees who were progressing towards their qualifications as teaching assistants. These employees were also receiving help to improve their literacy and numeracy skills; the largest impact

on their work at school was judged to be the improvement in the assistants' numeracy skills.

27. However, in almost all of the providers surveyed, the focus of development in employment remained the occupational NVQ. Providers did not do enough to promote, or provide, skills for life training. Few had specialist skills for life trainers or assessors or sufficient resources to support employees' development. The training needs analysis they carried out did not place enough emphasis on discrete skills for life training, or on skills for life within a package of training offered to employers.
28. More than half of the employers visited were reluctant to broach skills for life issues with their staff. They, and their staff, did not believe that the lack of literacy or numeracy skills was a barrier. The stigma associated with skills for life remained, and less than a quarter of providers had adequate strategies, or sufficient confidence, to promote skills for life training to employers and their staff. Even when skills for life needs were identified, employees were not given sufficient encouragement to take up training opportunities. In one example, eight employees were identified as having a need, but only one attended local classes to improve literacy and numeracy skills.
29. Assessors provided effective help to enable employees with skills for life needs to achieve their NVQs. However, much of this help circumvented employees' skills for life needs rather than developing their skills. For example, assessors helped employees with poor writing skills by loaning them dictation machines to record answers to questions, rather than developing their writing skills. Other assessors compiled written records of answers provided by employees who had particular language difficulties.
30. Mixed messages from different LSC local offices during the early stages of the programme had the effect of limiting the number of specialist providers who held contracts for delivery of skills for life programmes funded by Train to Gain. Some of the collaborative relationships that had begun to develop between vocational and skills for life providers during the Employer Training Pilot, and the increasing awareness of the importance of skills for life, were lost when contracts were awarded for Train to Gain.
31. A few of the providers were under the impression that skills for life training could not be funded through Train to Gain. Employees with language needs were not eligible for help despite these needs presenting a barrier to their development. The providers visited welcomed revised guidance from the LSC enabling skills for life delivery, but this had not had an impact on the uptake of provision.

Involvement of employers and supervisors

32. In the better examples of provision funded by Train to Gain and visited for this survey, workplace supervisors were fully involved in employees' programmes of

training and assessment. They understood the requirements of particular qualifications. They provided training or coaching to help develop employees' competence, and arranged opportunities for employees to develop new skills and competence if necessary. For example, one employer reorganised shift work to enable employees to be released for training. Others gave personal support and extra tuition to employees. Employers and supervisors were well informed about employees' progress towards their awards.

33. However, in over half of cases, employers and supervisors had insufficient knowledge of, or involvement in, their employees' training or assessment. They were not invited to comment on employees' progress, did not attend progress or assessment reviews with employees and were not routinely involved in planning additional training to fill gaps in employees' skill or knowledge. If changes to an employee's normal work routine were required for training or assessment, it was often left to the employee to negotiate this with their supervisor. Although supervisors were usually informed of employees' progress after the review, this communication was often brief and did not give sufficient detail on the progress employees were making.

Impact of training

34. Although fewer than one in 10 of employers had formal mechanisms for evaluating the impact of training on business performance, all could attribute improvements in employee performance to the training and assessment they received through Train to Gain; over three quarters had specific examples of ways in which it had made their businesses more competitive or effective. For example, one employer found that his business was more successful in competitive tendering because his workforce was now qualified. Another found that his safety record improved. Others stated that the qualifications that employees held gave clients confidence in the service that employers offered.

Case study

One employer in the hospitality and catering industry reported improved profitability as a result of the training funded by Train to Gain for employees working in the kitchen. Their improved skills meant that less food was wasted during its preparation and cooking. The savings made had enabled the employer to increase its investment in equipment.

35. Although a few of the employers visited, particularly in the care sector, remained concerned that qualified employees would leave their employment for higher paid jobs elsewhere, the majority found that the training and accreditation offered through Train to Gain had reduced staff turnover.

Leadership and management of provision

36. The management of programmes was good. Providers had effective systems for engaging with employers and for promoting a range of business services and training, including the provision funded by Train to Gain. Communications and working relationships between providers and employers were also good. Those with experience of work-based learning had made timely and effective adaptations to their programmes and procedures to enable them to respond promptly to funding body and employers' requirements. They made effective use of existing quality assurance processes to monitor and improve their Train to Gain provision. A few of the providers were adept at using a range of different funding sources and employer contributions to develop a package of training and assessment to meet employers' needs. Those providers with less experience of work-based learning were slower to recruit participants and had spent more time establishing systems for delivery and for quality assurance, but their plans included appropriate documentation, policies and processes.
37. Over three quarters of the providers surveyed had responded very flexibly to employers' needs for training and assessment under Train to Gain. Despite a lack of development funding for Train to Gain, they had adapted their provision so that employees could receive training and assessment at times that best met employees' and employers' needs, while minimising any impact on employers' business activities. They expanded the range of training and qualifications that they offered to enable employers to access the provision. For example, one provider arranged to offer NVOs in crowd control in response to identified employer's needs. Another provider arranged for an assessor who spoke Cantonese to work with employees in a local Chinese community.
38. Providers promoted their Train to Gain provision as part of a portfolio of business services, offering it where it was appropriate. Most of the providers worked hard to reduce bureaucracy for employers. Around half were working towards the new employer standards. Employers were highly satisfied with the service they received from the providers surveyed and many were keen to build on the relationships they had established.
39. The providers had clear systems for distinguishing between employees following a programme funded for assessment only, and those who were on a programme that also included training. They monitored the time spent on training in programmes funded at the higher level, but these training logs sometimes included activities that were not training, such as assessment, that had not been identified by external audits. Less than a quarter of the providers offered more than the 20-hour minimum training requirement associated with the higher funding level. For those employees who had already been trained by their employers and were experienced in their jobs, this was not a weakness, but it became so when higher volumes of training for employees were required, for example when they included those who were newly recruited to their jobs.

Equality of opportunity

40. Although health and safety were often checked thoroughly by providers, they rarely checked whether organisations had equal opportunities policies or procedures. Progress reviews with employees were often used to check whether employees had any concerns about their treatment, but were not used to reinforce employees' understanding of their rights, responsibilities and entitlement to equality of opportunity.

Employer engagement

41. Train to Gain had helped about three quarters of the providers surveyed to extend their employer base and reach employers who had not done much training in the recent past. A few had increased the volume of their cost recovery work as a result of promoting employer investment in training. Most of the employers surveyed had existing or recent links with providers, and were enthusiastic and supportive of training in general. Despite this, almost all met the criteria for hard to reach employers. Genuinely hard to reach employers – those with a poor history of training or strongly resistant to it – did exist within the employer base of a small number of providers, often as a result of good work done with union learning representatives; however, there were too few of them.

Case study

One provider of training in construction conducted a detailed organisational needs analysis with employers, many of whom were micro-businesses working as subcontractors. It used a cluster approach to target employees. The provider's assessors worked in geographical areas to visit employees where they were subcontracted to work. Training and assessment was more accessible to employees, more cost effective to deliver and the provider was more successful in engaging 'hard to reach' employers.

42. The sector skills areas covered by the research for this survey mirrored starts identified in LSC data. A high proportion of the employees recruited were in care and construction, where drivers for participation and accreditation include legislation or health and safety requirements. A few of the employers visited in these sectors saw provision funded by Train to Gain as a way of 'badging' their employees' existing skills and meeting legislative requirements.
43. The survey identified employers that had benefited from the training and assessment provided for their employees, and had increased their commitment to, and investment in, training as a result. However, too many employers still wanted training at no cost to themselves or claimed that they had no need for a highly skilled workforce. Few employers beat a path to providers' doors. Most

of the employees were recruited as a result of promotional work carried out by providers, suggesting that provision was supply driven, rather than demand-led.

44. The providers and employers surveyed often found that the eligibility criteria limited their ability to offer training and accreditation to those who could benefit from it. Some of this had been alleviated by increased provision of level 3 qualifications, and level 3 'jumpers' – provision for people without a qualification at level 2 or 3 but doing a level 3 job. However, this additional flexibility did not help those who had already gained a level 2 qualification some time ago, or non-vocational qualifications such as GCSEs or GCE O levels, or in an unrelated occupational area. Regional LSC funding was used in the North West to overcome this limitation.
45. Around a quarter of the employers found that the requirement for full level 2 or 3 qualifications diminished the demand-led focus of Train to Gain. They would have preferred smaller or customised qualifications, or knowledge-based rather than competence-based qualifications. Priority qualifications did not always meet employers' needs accurately. For example, the Information and Technology Qualification, was deemed a priority in one region. However, the employers surveyed in this region found that it focused too narrowly on information technology skills and did not meet their needs effectively. Business administration qualifications, with the inclusion of relevant IT units, proved more appropriate for these employers.
46. Eligibility criteria also created difficulties for employers if some of their employees were eligible for publicly funded training and accreditation while others were not. In a minority of cases their providers were successful in persuading these employers to pay for employees who were not eligible. Where employers had training budgets, the funding provided by Train to Gain was not always released to enable training of employees who were not eligible, or to train employees at higher level. One employer was sufficiently impressed by the impact of the vocational and skills for life training it had received, to commit to continuing with such training even if Government funding was removed. However, this approach was not normally found among the employers visited for this survey, particularly where they had not budgeted for this investment or where they could not offer work at higher levels to aspiring employees.

Consortia

47. Six consortia were visited as part of the survey. Where they were well established, or existed for purposes other than winning a contract for Train to Gain funding, they often added value to provision. Such consortia had worked well to develop systems and share expertise to provide a more comprehensive service to employers. For example, they provided a centralised source of information and advice from external agencies, had systematic arrangements for sharing good practice in managing provision and promoted referrals between partners in the consortium. They used performance data to monitor

and evaluate provision and shared this information openly and transparently with consortium members. Consortia managed all the provision available to ensure that capacity was available where it was needed. One consortium had appointed its own internal broker to stimulate demand and provide an advisory service to employers.

Case study

One consortium leader had very supportive arrangements for promoting quality improvement in its members. It had a three-stage selection process, culminating in a site visit to assess the quality of premises and capacity to deliver programmes funded by Train to Gain. A separate team of staff carried out thorough monitoring and audits of provision. Less experienced providers in the consortium were given additional support and visits by the consortium leader. It issued good guidance documents which were used well by providers. The consortium leader had plans to supplement this support with internal inspections to assess the quality of teaching and learning offered by each provider. Regular consortium events encouraged open and frank exchange of information. Members contributed well to these events, suggesting improvements which were valued by the consortium lead.

48. In the less effective consortia surveyed, the requirement to form consortia served only to increase bureaucracy for providers or to offer duplication for employers. Although consortium members valued the collaborative working that followed their formation, they believed that such collaboration could have been achieved without contractual requirements to form consortia.
49. The funding that consortia had 'top sliced' for their management activities varied from consortium to consortium. For example, in one region it was as low as 5% in one consortium and as much as 24% in another. The services offered by these consortia did not correlate to the proportion of funding taken for these services. A few providers belonged to more than one consortium and also had contracts in their own right. This often led to duplication in systems and paperwork, and to confusion among employers, who were sometimes approached by several providers and the brokerage service, all offering the same provision. The bureaucracy associated with consortium membership could be resource hungry. One consortium lead did not work in patterns that allowed for year round delivery or shift work.
50. Arrangements for management in the six consortia visited were at least satisfactory. However, some had been slow to implement thorough arrangements for the quality monitoring and improvement of provision. Consortia leads did not always understand that their role included the quality assurance of the work of other consortium members; they lacked the confidence or the enthusiasm to adopt such a role. Different LSC areas provided different guidance, used different funding levels, made different

demands and used different timescales; this increased bureaucracy for those providers and consortia working with more than one LSC.

The role of the brokerage service

51. Very few of the employees on the programmes surveyed were from employers recruited by brokers. Eighteen providers supplied detailed data on employees' recruitment. Only five per cent of the employees came from employers referred by brokers. Targets for the brokerage service were based on referrals to providers rather than training starts. Where referrals were made, they were sometimes inaccurate, by as much as 20% according to one provider. For example, employees were ineligible or the wrong programme had been proposed to meet their needs. Brokers did not carry out sufficient training needs analysis at organisational or individual level. Some did not have the specialist knowledge that was needed to tease out employers' needs. These weaknesses were also identified in the former Adult Learning Inspectorate's report on the impact of the brokerage service. In some cases, brokers had given inaccurate information to employers on the arrangements for skills for life training within Train to Gain. Where recruitment was generated by providers, the required brokerage link in the process often created frustrating delays for no gain in service.
52. The providers with successful referrals from the brokerage service stated that they had had to do much work to establish effective working relationships with brokers. One provider contrasted referrals from one region where it had a well established relationship with the brokerage service with another region where its Train to Gain contract was more recent. It had received very few referrals from the brokerage service in this new region despite the provider's good performance overall.
53. During the survey, there were signs that the impact of the brokerage service may be improving. Recent inspection reports have stated that employees have been recruited through the brokerage service and reports of brokerage involvement grew as fieldwork on this survey progressed. However, the impact of the brokerage service remains inadequate.

Notes

Between September 2007 and April 2008 a team of five of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors visited 48 providers which offered training funded by Train to Gain to a total of 13,045 employees. Of these providers, 19 were colleges of further education, two were providers of adult and community learning and the remainder were private training providers. The sample included six consortia of providers of Train to Gain. The providers visited included representatives from each of the nine LSC regions in England. During their visits, inspectors interviewed a total of 104 workplace supervisors or managers at 74 employers. They spoke to 157 employees who were currently on, or had recently completed, a programme funded

by Train to Gain. They also interviewed 200 managers or assessors employed by the providers visited for the survey. Inspectors examined individual learning plans and progress review records for employees, providers' policies and procedures, quality assurance reports and performance data. In addition, the survey team analysed inspection reports for 97 providers of Train to Gain. They spoke to six representatives from regional LSCs and a representative of the LSC nationally.

Further information

Useful websites:

Information about Train to Gain can be found at:

www.traintogain.gov.uk;

www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/ttg;

www.dius.gov.uk.

Key strategic documents include:

The Leitch review of skills: prosperity for all in the global economy, HM Treasury, 2006; 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.

World class apprenticeships; unlocking talent, building skills for all; DIUS, 2007; 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.

Survey reports by the ALI: *Employer training pilot survey*, 2005; www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR695.pdf; and *The impact of the brokerage service on learners*, ALI, 2006; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Post-16-learning-and-skills/Read-about-this-new-section/The-impact-of-the-brokerage-service-on-learners/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Post-16-learning-and-skills/Read-about-this-new-section/The-impact-of-the-brokerage-service-on-learners/(language)/eng-GB).

Annex

The following providers contributed to the survey and arranged interviews with employers and employees on programmes funded by Train to Gain.

A4E
AF Fitzgerald
Amersham and Wycombe College
ARC Training
Aspiration Training (England) Ltd
Axia Training
Basingstoke College of Technology
Bishop Auckland College
Bourneville College
Brockenhurst College (Solutions)
CableCom
Charnwood Training Consultants
Chichester College
Children's Links
Cumbria Adult Education Service
Durham County Council
Eastleigh College
Environmental Monitoring Solutions
Highbury College
Hudson and Hughes
Isle of Wight College
Kingston College
Knowsley Community College
Lambeth College
Learning Curve
Leicestershire Engineering Training Group
Locomotivation
M2 Training
Merton College
NW Chamber of Commerce
Norton Webb
Oldham College
Polymer Training Ltd
Pro-Vision
Salisbury College
Skills Solutions
South Bank Training
Southgate College
Stoke-on-Trent College (Staffordshire Train to Gain Partnership)
Stourbridge College
TM Construction

Trade Assessments
Training and Recruitment Partnership
Triangle Training Ltd
Ultra Training Ltd
Weston College
YMCA
Yorkshire Trade School.