



# Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network Research Brief – Employer Engagement

Train to Gain: Learning from the experience of  
existing contractors about effective practice in  
engaging with employers and providing opportunities  
for learners

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## **Executive Summary.**

Train to Gain (T2G) contractors have developed relationships with Skills Brokers, employers, and individual employees during the lifetime of the Train to Gain initiative. These T2G contractors have learned how to respond to employers and have developed approaches that have resulted in successful employer engagement and the delivery of training to meet identified employer and employee requirements.

The focus of the project research was to identify models of good practice and successful strategies for effectively responding to higher level training and qualification needs of employers and individual learners in Kent and Medway. Background research of relevant literature was undertaken to set the broader context.

The research drew on the experiences of existing Train to Gain contractors who have been delivering work-based and work related qualifications and training primarily at Levels 2 and 3. Interviews were conducted with managers and Sales Executives in two colleges and managers from two Private Training Providers. The views of Skills South East, the agency with responsibility for promoting training through Train to Gain funding, were also sought through meetings.

A survey of employers in Kent and Medway was undertaken through the use of a postal questionnaires (1,000 being sent, 66 returned), and interviews with a sample of employers who agreed to further discussions. Employers were asked about their recent and future higher levels training requirements. Employers were also canvassed as to how they selected training providers, whether they preferred training to be delivered in their places of work and what in their opinion constituted good practice. Opinions were also sought on effective types of marketing information, the importance of accredited provision and value of training in organisation terms. In addition, questions were included to explore any areas where provision had been difficult to access and whether employers would support staff to undertake higher levels training and areas of interest for supporting development of managers.

Analysis of information obtained showed that all employers had engaged with training over the last two years, but that only around 3% had been at higher levels. Overall, employers preferred training to be delivered flexibly on their own premises, and where possible preferred to work with previously used providers. Only 36% of respondents indicated that they would support staff to undertake higher levels training, however, 27% of the sample indicated they were unsure. Of employers interviewed, 68% said they would encourage staff to undertake higher levels training. Employers also indicated that they would be interested in management and business development training as well as administration, marketing and financial planning and accounting.

Key aspects of good practice in engaging with employers were identified, and included clear communications, quick and effective follow-up to enquiries, responsive and flexible provision, competitive pricing coupled with funding advice, relevant informational materials demonstrating benefits of training to organisation and good accounts management.

## **A. Overview of the research into good practice for Engaging with Employers in Kent and Medway.**

1. **Nature of Work:** Train to Gain (T2G) contractors have developed relationships with T2G skills brokers, employers, and individual employees during the lifetime of the Train to Gain initiative. Train to Gain providers have contacts with many hundreds of individuals who have benefited from Level 2 and Level 3 training, some of whom may now be willing to consider progressing to Higher Education. These T2G contractors have learned how to respond to employers and have developed approaches that have resulted in successfully delivered contracts. As T2G skills brokers start to understand more about Higher Education and what it can offer, so Higher Education needs to learn from existing contractors how best to engage with, and respond to, employers' needs, at the same time as meeting work-based learners' aspirations.
2. The project sought to research how Higher Education Institutions can effectively respond to the training and qualification needs of employers and individual learners in Kent and Medway, drawing on the experiences of existing Train to Gain contractors and Skills South East. The research sought to identify models of good practice by canvassing employers for their views as to what they require from training providers and, what constitutes effective practice in providing information on provision and in the delivery of training. Background research was undertaken through a review of literature to establish the broader context of higher levels training initiatives and overall levels and success of higher levels provision. Such provision would take account of individual higher level skills and CPD, whilst also supporting the need to develop high level learning to support regional economic development. The project also sought to investigate likely demand for higher level training, as indicated in responses from employers and from a sample of learners. However, very few responses were received from learners, and this aspect of the project has not been included in the analysis of data.
3. **Aims:** The project aims were twofold:
  - to survey existing and past learners and their employers to determine whether further progression to level 4 study is desired, and if so what sort of provision would be required in terms of flexibility of delivery, cost, etc. The provide opportunities for information, advice and guidance to be offered to employers and individuals with the aim of opening up opportunities for further study, and re-engaging work based learners.
  - to consult with two colleges and two private training provides who have T2G contracts to determine, from their knowledge and experience, how Higher Education would need to relate to employers, how to respond effectively to their enquiries, how to balance needs of the employers with the needs of the learners etc. The final report will identify examples of good practice.

## **Delivery of the Project Brief**

4. The main focus concentrated on research into successful strategies for engaging with employers and meeting training needs, so seeking to inform institutions wishing to deliver higher levels training and skills. Existing research undertaken in the South East was also be referenced so as to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. A number of employers were contacted and their views sought.
5. Previous research undertaken in Kent and Medway on behalf of the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network has identified future training needs in the key sectors based on Sector Skills Agreements and surveys of employers. This research did not seek to duplicate this work, but to build on earlier findings through the consideration of what constitutes effective communication and delivery strategies.

## **Research Methodology**

6. The research was based on both primary and secondary sources of information including:
  - web-based research and review of available literature to identify the scope and nature of existing training provision and engagement with employers and key initiatives resulting from national and local government policies;
  - meetings with representatives of two Private Training Providers and two Further Education Colleges in Kent and Medway along with Skills South East;
  - contact with employers, initially through a questionnaire and then through telephone interviews;
  - questionnaires to a sample of learners to gain feedback on current and future training.
7. The research explored potential demand amongst a sample of employers in Kent and Medway for higher level training. In all some 1,000 employers were contacted through a postal questionnaire, and 66 responses were received. Sixteen interviews were conducted to explore what employers would deem to be good practice. Whilst the number of responses was small, clear indications as to good practice were identified. Learner responses obtained showed low levels of interest in training at higher levels, however the sample size did not allow for meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

## **Outcomes**

8. The research has led to identification of some successful strategies for engaging with employers who have higher level training and CPD needs. The report will be shared with all the Lifelong Learning Network partners. It is hoped that this research may help inform future developments to further existing work-based learning provision.

## **B. Overview of the context of higher levels training provision.**

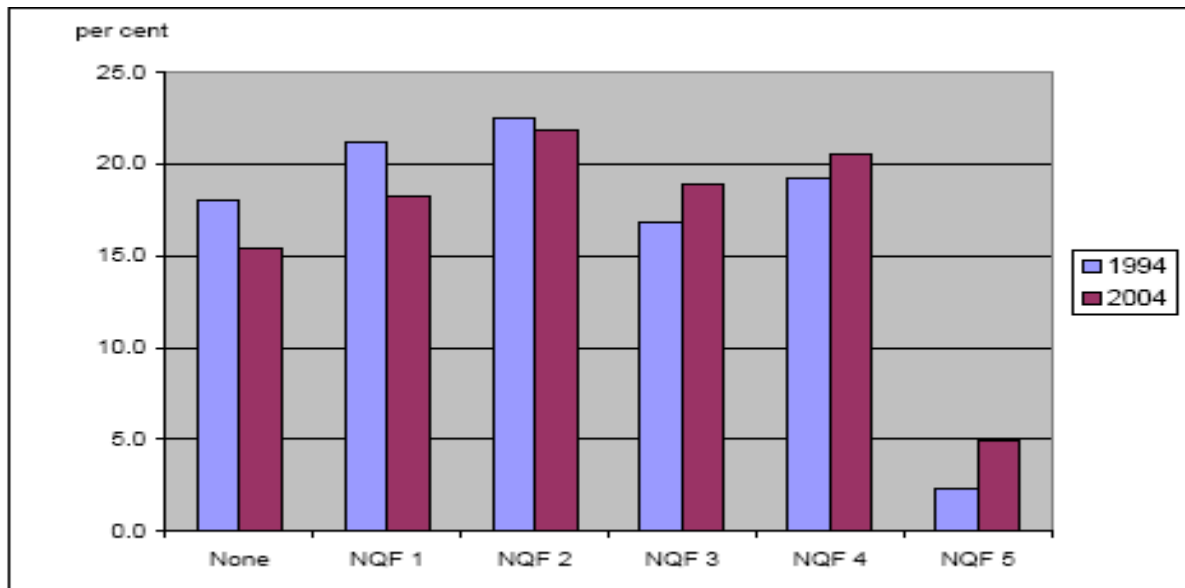
9. There have been significant changes in participation in education and training in recent years across the United Kingdom, with these changes reflected in the qualifications held by the working population. The patterns of employment for those with qualifications may be seen as a result of both supply and demand factors. Recent trends have shown a rise in formal qualifications held by those in employment, and whilst some may see this as a result of increased supply of qualified workers, others argue that this reflects real changes in demand, with jobs requiring more formal and higher level qualifications (Purcell et al, 2005)<sup>1</sup>.
10. As highlighted in a recent report commissioned by Higher Education South East (HESE)<sup>2</sup>, the increasingly competitive global economy means that the UK faces new challenges. The economic competitiveness of the UK relies on improving skills and increasing productivity through applying new knowledge and maximising innovation, enterprise and creativity. To facilitate this progress it will be essential that there is investment in the development of new products, processes and services and that new ways of doing business are developed within a knowledge based economy. Therefore, utilising the Higher Education (HE) knowledge base is seen as essential and there is a need to develop stronger, more coherent and more substantial HE-business partnerships.
11. These issues have taken on even more importance recently with the publication of Leitch Report, *Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills*<sup>3</sup>, published in December 2006 on the UK's long-term skills needs. The Review praises the excellent education provided by universities, but suggests that too little of the provision is accessed by employers and employees or reflects the needs of the workforce. Its main recommendations include increasing employer investment in Level 4 and above qualifications in the workplace. The report recommends that the UK should commit to 40% of the adult working age population qualified to Level 4 and above by 2020 (up from 29% today). Realising this stretching target, Leitch suggests, will require much greater engagement between HE, employers and employees, especially for part-time, bespoke and bite-size learning.
12. Government policies have had a major impact on the supply of workers with qualifications, particularly in higher education. The proportion of young people with formal qualifications is much higher than for older people, so producing a strong cohort effect. The picture has also been reinforced by the increasing qualification rates for older people, producing an 'upskilling' effect.

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<sup>1</sup> Purcell, K., Elias, P., Davies, R. and Wilton, N. (2005) *The Class of '99: A study of the early labour market experience of recent graduates.*

<sup>2</sup> *Employer Engagement and Higher Level Skills*, Harwood M, Nixon, I. May 2007

<sup>3</sup> [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/523/43/leitch\\_finalreport051206.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/523/43/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf)



Source: IER estimates based on LFS data, constrained to match *Working Futures* estimates.

**Figure 1 - Overview of the context of higher levels training provision.**

13. Leitch also acknowledges that a rapid demographic change that will take place over the next decade. There will be an increasing 'ageing' of the workforce, with 75% of those who will be in workforce in 2020 already in work, and a significant decrease in the number of 17 to 18 year olds. As a result, there may be greater levels of competition amongst universities for 'home' students for first degrees from a smaller pool of younger people and there is likely to be a broader social mix of people studying HE, many of whom are already in work.
14. The central messages of the Leitch Report have informed funding policy. In the grant letter of January 2007, the Department for Education and Skills set out targets to deliver a growth strategy of at least 5,000 additional entrants year on year being engaged in provision co-funded by employers as part of a wider strategy to promote an (employer) demand-led system at all levels. Such a system would build on a range of related developments, notably specialist diplomas, the qualifications reform, Sector Skills Councils, National Skills Academies and the regional Train to Gain services. The Department also emphasised the need to develop stronger working relationships with LSCs.
15. The HEFCE response to this challenge has been through its Employer Engagement Strategy<sup>4</sup> which has prioritised areas of work concerned with higher level skills and workforce development. These included an invitation to all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to undertake pilot projects<sup>5</sup> designed to test various forms of employer engagement (HEIF funding), and specific

<sup>4</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/)

<sup>5</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/pilot/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/pilot/)

funding for three regional Higher Level Skills Pathfinder projects (HLSPs)<sup>6</sup> through its Strategic Development Fund. Alongside these initiatives, the Council has funded 28 Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) designed to improve the coherence, clarity and progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through HE. Four individual HE institutions and one partnership have been funded to develop approaches to flexibly delivered learning (the Flexible Learning Pathfinders)<sup>7</sup>.

16. HEFCE's employer engagement strategy has been developed in response to policy directives and the lessons learned from employer engagement and workforce development activities. The HLSPs are an important element of this strategy, with their objectives being to:

- embed HE in employer workforce development and skills strategies regionally, sectorally and nationally;
- embed workforce development and skills in HE providers' strategies;
- promote greater co-funding of HE provision by employers.<sup>8</sup>

17. The HLSPs were tasked with including<sup>9</sup>:

- *Synergy of brokerage mechanisms, including Train to Gain, to encompass higher level skills diagnostics and signposting to appropriate HE provision – by exploring mechanisms that bring coherence to HE brokerage and making effective links with Train to Gain.*<sup>10</sup>
- *The capacity to deliver negotiated work-based learning (experiential and instruction-led) within a framework of flexible lifelong learning – by broadening the take-up of higher level skills, and identifying and helping to address barriers to participation.*
- *Appropriate mechanisms to support co-funding with employers and learners – by testing how programmes can be developed, packaged and marketed to create funding partnerships between employers, learners and providers which will share the costs and risks of provision.*

18. The HLSPs have developed a range of responses to address different approaches in engaging with employers and identifying employer training needs. These include working with a wide range of partners, having a local

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<sup>6</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/path/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/path/)

<sup>7</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible/)

<sup>8</sup> 'Higher Level Skills Projects Project Brief for Regional Partners', HEFCE, April 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Formative evaluation of the Higher Level Skills Pathfinders, HEFCE August 2008

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the report there are references to brokers or intermediaries as the people or organisations delivering these brokerage mechanisms. It is important to note that there were different interpretations of and relationships around the mechanisms.

and regional rather than a sector approach, using specialist higher level skills advisers, engaging with FE colleges and ensuring inclusive approaches. Based on evidence to date, most of the employers, the majority of which has been larger employers, have existing relationships with HEIs, and recognize the importance of higher level skills.

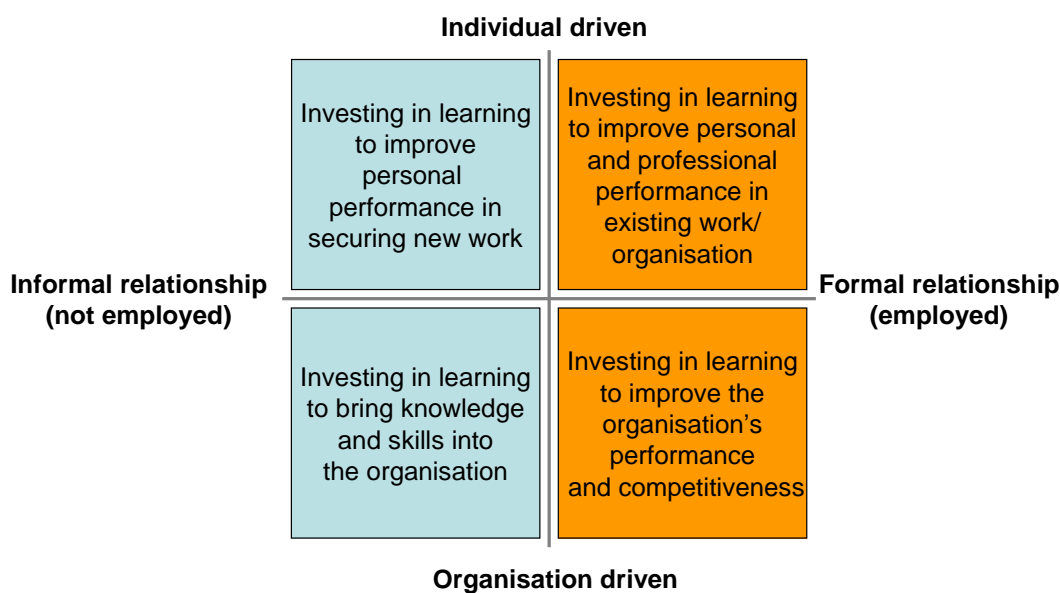
19. The placement of brokers within HEIs, as in the North East and South West, has been shown to provide an important focus for employer engagement activities, through the creation of an 'employer-facing' resource and a direct feedback mechanism for employer need which can then be disseminated within the HEI as appropriate.
20. The LSC nationally has set out its priorities for HE in *Partnership, Provision, Participation and Progression: the Learning and Skills Council's Strategy for Higher Education* (May 2006)<sup>11</sup>. This strategy puts a strong focus on the need to continue to build a meaningful and coherent landscape of higher-level vocational learning and skills. Unlike the HEFCE strategy, the LSC strategies see higher level provision delivered through FE, with provision responsive to the needs of employers. There is a critical role for FE in promoting wider participation in HE, particularly through the on-going development of LLNs, and the active and strategic role of FE colleges in these networks.
21. A joint LSC/HEFCE progression strategy aims to transform participation in and progression to HE, and seeks to address the divide between prescribed and non-prescribed HE provision (which historically have signified where the funding responsibilities lie), and issues associated with preparation for HE at Level 3.
22. Whilst the national dimension to higher level skills and workforce development is constantly evolving, key messages have emerged for HEIs. These include recognition by Government that high level skills are at the heart of economic competitiveness and that widening participation into HE through adults in work will promote greater levels of economic and social inclusion.
23. The HESE funded study into 'Employer engagement and higher level skills' clearly demonstrated that HE institutions in the South East are providing learning solutions to meet the higher level skills needs of employers, both within the region and beyond. A number of institutions have identified workforce development as a strategic priority, developing their portfolios and exploring the market, building on individual institutions' core strengths and emerging sector priorities.
24. These Higher Education Institutions are putting in place the processes and infrastructure necessary to enable them to better respond to an identified workforce development need. Such institutional approaches and strategies include:

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<sup>11</sup> <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/2006/ourbusiness/strategy/nat-partnershipprovisionparticipationprogressionhestrategy-pu-may2006.pdf>

- Analysis of labour market information and existing provision;
- Further development of partnerships with other universities and colleges;
- Clarification of funding and employer support initiatives;
- Development of central units to support employer engagement activities ;
- Directories of 'expertise' which capture the academic strengths ;
- Flexible (and work-based) delivery arrangements ;
- More responsive validation and quality assurance procedures ;
- Project management procedures and systems to support client relationship management.

25. It is worth clarifying for the purpose of this project, what is meant by 'work-based learning'. The Higher Education Academy's definition of 'learning which accredits or extends the workplace skills and abilities of employees' would seem to offer a definition which makes clear the key interests in this field. As the research undertaken has focused on employer and, by association, learner views, this approach offers a clear reference point, whether the key drivers arise from learning and training to improve individual or organisation performance.



Nixon, I. (2006) *Work-based learning: Illuminating the higher education landscape*, HE Academy

**Figure 2 – Workforce development typology<sup>12</sup>**

26. The scope of provision encompassed in this definition forms part of the HE sector's initial and continuing professional development offer at Level 4 and above, and includes HE delivered in FE. The provision can comprise prescribed and non-prescribed HE, including NVQs, HNCs and HNDs, Foundation degrees, part-time undergraduate and postgraduate taught

<sup>12</sup> Nixon, I., Smith, K., Stafford, R. & Camm, S. (2006) *Work-Based Learning: Illuminating the Higher Education Landscape*. The Higher Education Academy.  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/research/WBL.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/research/WBL.pdf)

programmes and distance learning programmes, postgraduate research programmes, as well as accredited and non-accredited short courses.

27. Attracting, developing and retaining an adaptable and highly skilled workforce in a highly competitive global market has become important for an increasing number of organisations. Irrespective of size, organisations that value the knowledge and expertise of their employees and invest in their continuing professional development benefit from loyalty and retention of expertise, so showing a significant return on their investment. From an organisational perspective, the primary driver behind investing in staff development and training is to improve organisation performance.
28. The National Employer Skills Survey (NESS) estimates that in 2007, employers invested £38.6 billion in training. The government has estimated that more than £5 billion could be delivered by HEIs nationally. However, it should be noted that the concept of 'level' does not always easily apply to non-accredited provision, as employers often tend to focus on learning as a continuous process. The GHK Report for HEFCE into employer investment in higher levels skills<sup>13</sup> estimated a notional 15 per cent of investment at higher levels, producing a market worth in the region of £1.33 billion. The Higher Education – Business and Community Interaction Survey, 2006-07 suggested that HEIs accessed up to £400 million of the market, including CPD.
29. The Centre for Enterprise (CFE) published a report in March 2008 focused on the East Midlands, and included information drawn from 438 interviews with organisations employing more than 25 staff. The findings showed that 39% of employers surveyed had invested in higher level skills,<sup>14</sup> and if the engagements with HEIs outside the East Midlands were included, this figure rose to 61%. Despite not having included employers with fewer than 25 employees, evidence clearly points to significant engagement with higher levels provision. The findings indicated that employers had used HEIs and other providers in almost equal proportions. Further, the majority of the higher-level learning covered by the CFE study (98%) was contributing towards qualifications. HEFCE is currently replicating the East Midlands study in two other regions to identify the extent to which employers are engaging with higher levels training and HEIs. The Workforce Training Survey undertaken by the Department for Education and Skills in 2007<sup>15</sup> which included smaller employers, showed that 41% of all employers reported undertaking some training that led to qualifications. This would suggest a strong correlation between level and accreditation, i.e., that higher levels skills development is more likely to lead to qualification achievement.

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<sup>13</sup> Employer Investment in Learning at National Qualifications Framework Level 4-8. A report on the policy issues for HEFCE and the Learning & Skills Council by GHK, August 2008.

<sup>14</sup> The demand for Higher Levels Skills from Business, CFE/East Midlands Universities Association, March 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Research Workforce Training in England 2006, Research Report No. 848, DfES, May 2007

30. The evidence from interviews undertaken for the Employer Investment in Learning Report referred to earlier, did, however, cast some doubt as to whether investment by employers in training and staff development at higher levels was quite so clearly linked to qualifications. The notion of level is really only meaningful in the context of a qualifications framework, either the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), such that the only way of knowing whether training is at higher levels is for it to be certified as such. Conversely, there is no definitive method of knowing the level of other training which is not linked to accredited outcomes, though evidence suggests that this constitutes the majority of employer investment through in-house and bespoke provision.
31. A significant part of higher-levels skills delivery has been found to cover such areas which have a generic focus on business, including such areas as business planning and strategy, team management, business management, marketing and sales, personnel and people management.
32. When considering the regional picture for training and employer engagement with higher levels provision, recent developments include the Regional Skills Partnership in the South East<sup>16</sup> – the Regional Skills for Productivity Alliance – established by key partners under SEEDA’s leadership with a focus on seven key activities through task groups, namely:
- Higher education
  - Supporting development of young people
  - Action for Business College Network
  - Local Skills for Productivity Alliances (LSPAs) – one in each of six sub-regions
  - Regional skills brokerage
  - Training pools
  - Skills for Life.
33. The Regional Economic Strategy for the South East highlights a ‘region of contrasts’ where ‘there are substantial differences in the labour market between the East and West of the region and between the landlocked interior and the coastal fringe. Differing skills needs, priorities and capabilities at a local level have led to the creation of six employer-led Local Skills for Productivity Alliances’ (LSPAs). These LSPAs have the following priorities:
- *“Provide a skills forum for employers, business intermediaries, employer representatives to inform workforce development funders and providers of what employers really want*
  - *Lead and act in a supportive and co-operative manner to address how partners can better identify and meet the demands of business*
  - *Identify where skills, business support and employment services can be aligned and ‘joined up’ to ensure a consistent and cohesive skills offer to employers*

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<sup>16</sup> [http://www.seeda.co.uk/Work\\_in\\_the\\_Region/Learning\\_&\\_Skills/Skills\\_for\\_Productivity/](http://www.seeda.co.uk/Work_in_the_Region/Learning_&_Skills/Skills_for_Productivity/)

- *Contribute and instigate delivery initiatives in each county by addressing market failure where gaps are identified*
- *Inform and contribute to the delivery of regional priorities and associated action”*

34. Each of the six LSPAs has developed a delivery framework which identifies key sector priorities, which in the case of Kent and Medway include:

- Construction
- Health and Social Care
- Culture and Creative
- Tourism and Hospitality

35. Kent and Medway colleges and universities have engaged with the local priorities through HEI Business Development Units, and through the work of the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network. Partner institutions have focused on new ways of engaging with employers and methods of delivery of provision, with development of courses to meet specific business needs. Whilst qualifications may be important to individuals, employers want their staff to learn new skills that will improve organization productivity and performance.

36. One of the most significant challenges posed by the workforce development agenda is its' diversity. In recognition of this challenge, some institutions are putting into place strategic leadership and governance to bring together separately managed areas of activity (learning and teaching, research, knowledge transfer and business development). To support the employer engagement and demand-led higher levels provision are a range of interventions which aim to put in place the processes and infrastructure necessary to enable an institution to better respond to an identified workforce development need including:

- the provision of labour market information as part of an evidence based decision making process;
- Strategic alliances with other HEIs/FECs as part of a collaborative approach to ensure that the capacity and capability to respond to identified needs is more readily available;
- Central units to support employer engagement activities;
- Directories of 'expertise' which capture the academic strengths (and/or existing provision);
- Flexible (and work-based) delivery arrangements that fits with the nature and demands of the workplace;
- Validation and quality assurance procedures which facilitate the development of tailored provision in a timely and responsive manner;
- Development funding to reducing the full cost of design and delivery of bespoke solutions to meet higher level skills needs;
- Project management procedures and systems to support relationship management and collation of management information.

## **C. Analysis of research data.**

### **Project methodology.**

37. The data was gathered through face-to-face interviews with training providers and skills brokers and through a postal survey of employers in Kent and Medway and 16 follow-up telephone interviews with employers who indicated they would be willing to take part in an interview. Learner questionnaires were also circulated by two training providers, but due to administrative problems with the providers, only a very few responses were made available. Analysis has not been included due to the very small sample size.

#### **i) Train to Gain Providers – responses to interviews**

38. In total seven interviews were conducted with skills brokers and providers with Train to Gain contracts. Two colleges were approached, one in the south of the region and another in the west and managers responsible for Train to Gain provision interviewed. Two private training provider managers were interviewed, both of which have significant Train to Gain contracts in addition to other training work. Skills South East managers were also interviewed, one with overall responsibility for management of the service across the region, and another with responsibility for liaising with larger employers. Copies of the questions used as the basis for the face-to-face interviews can be found in Appendix 1. Notes of records of meetings are shown in Appendix 6.

39. Methods used to make employers aware of the range of provision and services offered by training providers fell broadly into the following categories:

- Email using 'glossy' marketing brochures (only found to be about 15% effective);
- Use of a telesales company with local knowledge for employer contacts;
- Use of skills brokers who are briefed on provider portfolio;
- Contacts generated through attendance at employer focused events such as business breakfasts and evening meetings and representation on local employer groups and forums;
- Use of articles on successful training in local newspapers;
- Advertising in some trade journals;
- Use of Case Studies in college newspaper – sent to employers;
- General advertising of provision linked to statutory requirements
- Use of business guides for employers – online and publications;
- Mail-shots including provider brochures;
- Train to Gain national advertising campaign along with regional and local advertisements;
- Train to Gain sector specific campaigns;
- Links with Chambers of Commerce;
- Awareness raising events organised by Skills South East.

40. When training providers were asked about methods for liaising with employers to ascertain training needs, private training providers used

marketing materials and telephone contacts, while the colleges largely utilised staff from their Business Development teams who made contact through phone calls and follow up visits to employers. Leads came either through Skills South East brokers or responses to information sent out to employers. Sales executives at one college were responsible for initiating contact with employers as well as following up on enquiries received. In the case of the college in question, sales executives from the Business Development team operated on a geographic basis rather than a sector basis, and develop contacts within their own locality, feeding back information to the central team through regular meetings. In this way information is used to structure engagement strategies and to build a broader picture of emerging training needs.

41. Once contact had been established with an employer, a visit was arranged either by a skills broker or one of the training provider's staff. In the case of Skills South East, the process then becomes employer led, with brokers arranging meetings to undertake an Organisation Needs Analysis. Training providers indicated a very similar approach, with a clear distinction having to be established between organisation 'needs' and what the organisation 'wants'. The key to successful engagement with employers was seen as helping to differentiate between what the employer may think is wanted to improve performance or fill skills gaps, and what is actually needed to deliver the improvements. Where providers may be invited to meet with employers to discuss a particular training requirement, for example, NVQs in Care, the provider will also aim to explore whether there are additional needs for other staff within the organisation. One private training provider outlined the five stages in their needs analysis process as:
- **Analysis** – identify the client's needs and capabilities and the skills gaps to be met. May also involve looking at the structure of the organisation as well as analysis of the productivity, number of tasks, etc.
  - **Design** – requires careful attention to employer and employees input and ensuring that information gained is reflected in the design of the training package to meet identified requirements. (This process was not about selling products that exist, but identifying what accredited courses or modules that may attract funding could be suitable, and where these may need to be customised, or where employers' own training may be incorporated and bespoke provision may need to be added).
  - **Implementation** – the delivery of the training, most frequently on the employers' premises. Where accredited units are delivered these may need to be customised or tailored to reflect the organisation's business, particularly in relation to assessment.
  - **Evaluation** – the suitability and satisfaction of the training provision.
  - **Sustainability** – ensuring systems are in place to sustain the benefits to the organisation and individual employees in the longer term.
42. In the case of larger companies, the needs analysis approach undertaken by Skills South East was very much a holistic one, with a structured approach assisting to define effective performance and to establish SMART targets.

This approach, shown in Figure 3 below, would then inform a training plan which must be seen as relevant to the organisation and its targets, meaningful in helping to achieve the desired outcomes and providing value added elements.

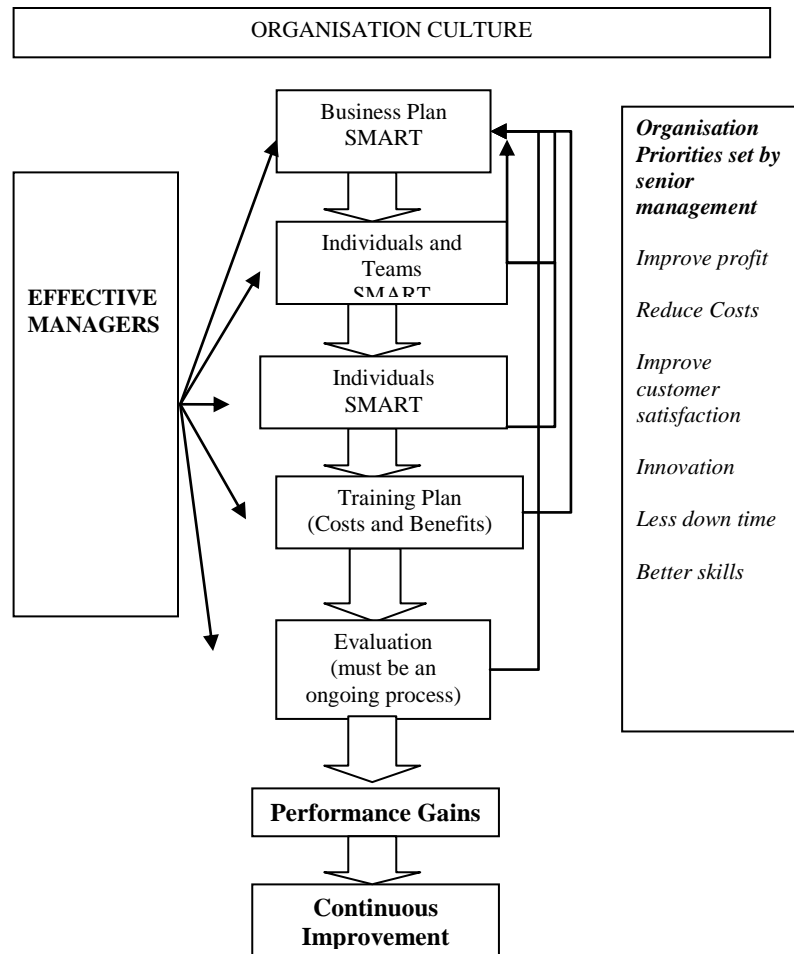


Figure 3 – Organisation Needs Analysis – Skills South East (larger organisations).

43. Feedback from employers had been positive in response to this type of needs analysis, as the organisation can define and own the outcomes, and the provider then identify relevant funded provision and cost out additional bespoke or customised elements.
44. The majority of provision delivered by the training providers interviewed was at Level 2, with one college provider delivering 95% of provision at this level and another provider 85%. One private training provider with provision in the Education Sector noted that around half of their training was at Level 2 and half at Level 3. Skills South East also reported that much of the demand for training requested by employers was currently at Levels 2 and 3, with very little demand at Level 4 and above. The majority of training was linked to accredited provision, primarily as this attracted funding which employers valued. A much smaller proportion was bespoke training, often short in duration to meet specific organisation requirements, for example, updating on use of key equipment.

45. Once training needs had been identified, all providers agreed that training had to be put in place quickly, with time-frames of a few weeks at most, subject to provider capacity. Where a provider could not meet the demand for training, they would refer the employer on to another provider. In the case of college providers all of whom work as part of a consortium of providers, referrals in the first instance would be to consortium partners. Skills South East noted that the ability to respond quickly to employers was an important factor for successful employer engagement, along with being able to manage the client's expectations.
46. When asked about employer's preferences for location of training, providers responded that where possible employers preferred training to be delivered on their own premises. Where a number of individuals from different organisations were identified as having a common training need, then a venue close to employers premises will be sought, e.g. Adult Education Centres. Where technical or specialist equipment was needed to undertake training but not available through the workplace, then training would be delivered on the training providers' premises.
47. Train providers and Skills South East were asked to identify what they thought constituted good practice in engaging with employers. One training provider defined this as "Give the employer what they want, not just what may be fundable". The following factors were identified as contributing to good practice:
- **Efficient handling of enquiries** - returning employers call within 2 working days, and not waiting for them to call back;
  - **Organisational needs analysis** - exploring broader training needs within the organisation, over and above the initial area of enquiry;
  - **Flexibility** – providing training in a manner and in a location that fits the employers needs;
  - **Cost effective** – advice on funding and on development and delivery for bespoke and tailored provision;
  - **Meeting expectations** – based on clear communications and identified outcomes;
  - **Good communications** with employers with single point of contact where appropriate, allowing a rapport with the employer to be developed (account management);
  - **Appropriate expertise** - putting the right people in place to talk to employers about their training needs, for example sector experts;
  - **Responsiveness** – listening to what the employer wants and identifying and agreeing appropriate provision, even where this may need programmes to be adapted and developed. Focus on skills and improvements in the first instance rather than qualifications;
  - **Good administrative and support mechanisms** to explore and negotiate how provision will be put in place;
  - **Transparent value** - making clear to employers the benefits to the organisation of the training being offered;

- **Good marketing** using information that complements the employers' business;
- **Clear progression routes** such that employers and learners know what further training and qualification options exist;
- **Quality provision** – but at the right price.

48. Once training had been delivered, most training providers ensured that they continued to maintain contact with employers, through phone calls or sending out of news letters and updates to raise awareness of new provision and additional training opportunities. For many providers repeat business is an important element of their operational strategy. Part of maintaining the rapport and trust that has been built up between provider and employer, is the monitoring of employer and learner satisfaction with the provision delivered. This is undertaken through follow-up phone calls to employers, use of questionnaires sent to both learners and employers, and e-surveys which can be accessed on line. Where this latter form of on-line feedback is used, members of the business development teams are able to access the information and gauge how satisfied employers are with the provision. Many learner surveys are seen as providing quantitative information whilst employer surveys provide more qualitative feedback. For many organisations, monitoring of completion and success rates amongst learners also provides an effective means of monitoring effectiveness of provision.

49. A number of training providers also identified barriers to employer engagement. Some barriers were linked to employers being bombarded with enquiries and information from training providers which could cause confusion and frustration. Too much information, or conflicting information, could lead employers to a position where they may not be able to understand what their training options might be. This in turn can lead to employers being guarded against working directly with providers and seeking alternative solutions, including providing their own training or postponing training. Additional barriers to employers engaging with training were identified as:

- ◆ **Financial** – costs of training provision and potential loss of production or employee time;
- ◆ **Loss of staff** to competitors once they have been trained;
- ◆ **Lack of capacity** amongst micro-SMEs to engage with training;
- ◆ **Waiting times** for delivery of popular provision including NVQs;
- ◆ **Stereo-typing of providers** – this can work against colleges and universities who are seen as only providing whole qualifications within their own settings.

50. Providers identified factors that could help improve the current systems as:

- ◆ More resources to deliver training and follow up with employers;
- ◆ More assessors to meet the demand for NVQs;
- ◆ New systems for managing capacity such that training can be provided quickly and flexibly;

- ◆ More holistic and transparent funding to meet training needs, including short unit based funding for skills provision;
- ◆ Good customer relationship management systems which are fully integrated and used by all staff engaging with employers, and linked in to the quality monitoring systems such that full cycle information is available.

51. Skills South East managers interviewed felt that for universities to engage with employers effectively, they would need to raise awareness of how they could help employers meet their knowledge and skills needs through flexible provision and work-based learning. Aspects such as the duration of provision, and how quickly and flexibly provision could be put in place would be key to raising levels of employer interest. Information would need to be targeted towards individual sectors and not at employers in general. Given the challenges that many employers are facing in an increasingly difficult market, HEIs need to demonstrate how they can work with employers to help develop solutions. The use of Case Studies to show how universities have provided training and qualifications that have increased productivity and skills are meaningful to employers, particularly those operating in competitive markets. Information on funding available also needs to be transparent, as costs can be a major deciding factor, particularly for small to medium sized companies.

52. Many of the points raised are consistent with the broader findings of research into employer engagement. The Stepping Higher Report<sup>17</sup> commissioned for the CBI identified that successful working with employers would depend upon:

- Tailored or customised provision individually adapted to the learning and development needs of organisations;
- Accredited programmes delivered on a part-time basis – flexibility;
- Integrated programmes that provide progression opportunities from apprenticeships;
- Non-accredited, informal learning particularly targeted at SMEs.

53. Successful engagement was seen to link to speed of responsiveness to enquiries, flexible delivery mechanisms, good learner support, ensuring the relevance of programmes and building staff capacity and capability to respond to employer requirements.

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<sup>17</sup> Stepping Higher – Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership. CBI 2008.

## ii) Employer responses to questionnaire survey.

54. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were sent out to employers in Kent and Medway, a database of employers having been purchased from the data-base agency InfoUK. Of those, 25 were returned as unknown or moved from address shown. From the remainder of the questionnaires sent out, 66 were completed and returned, representing a participation rate of 6.8%. Sixteen employers indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed about their training requirements, and these were then followed up, and the responses analysed separately (see section (iii) below).

55. The questionnaire was designed to ascertain what levels of training provision had been undertaken by employers in the last two years, and in which broad skills areas (see appendix 3). The employers were also asked to indicate how they selected a training provider, and to indicate where there were training needs that they had found difficult to meet. A table of results is attached in Appendix 4.

56. The higher levels needs were explored in questions 6, 7 and 8, starting with whether the employer would support staff undertaking higher levels training (above level 3 of the Credit and Qualifications Framework), and then looking at the nature of continuing professional development (CPD) that were viewed as important for managers. Finally employers were asked to indicate any identified areas of higher levels training they may have an interest in.

57. The questionnaire survey results are shown in below. All employers surveyed had provided staff with training of some level in the last 2 years. The majority, as shown in Figure 1 had provided training at level 2, with more than half having engaged with training at level 3. A number of employers had trained staff at more than on level. The numbers of employers indicating training at Level 4 and above was only 3%.

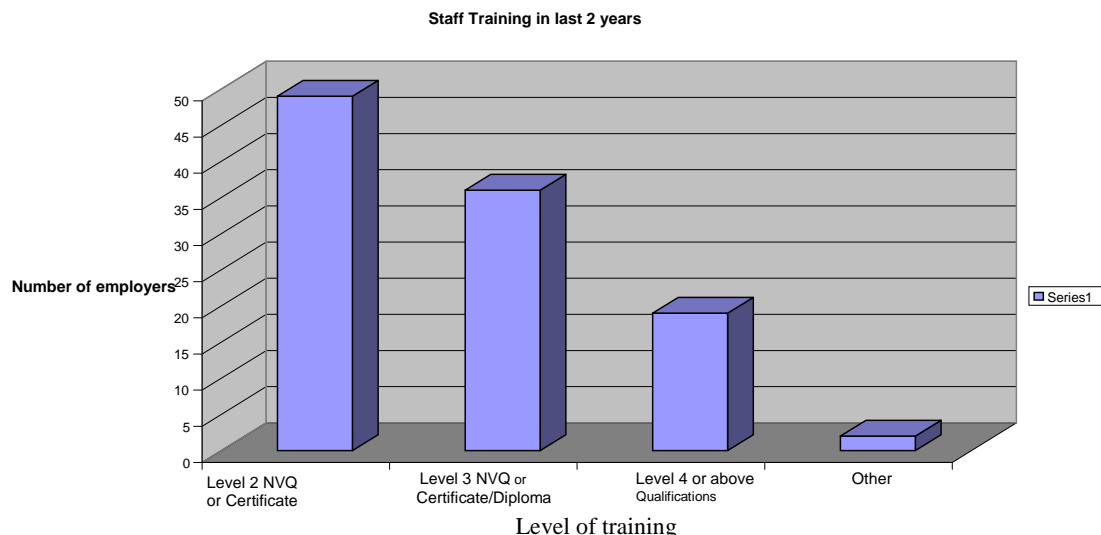
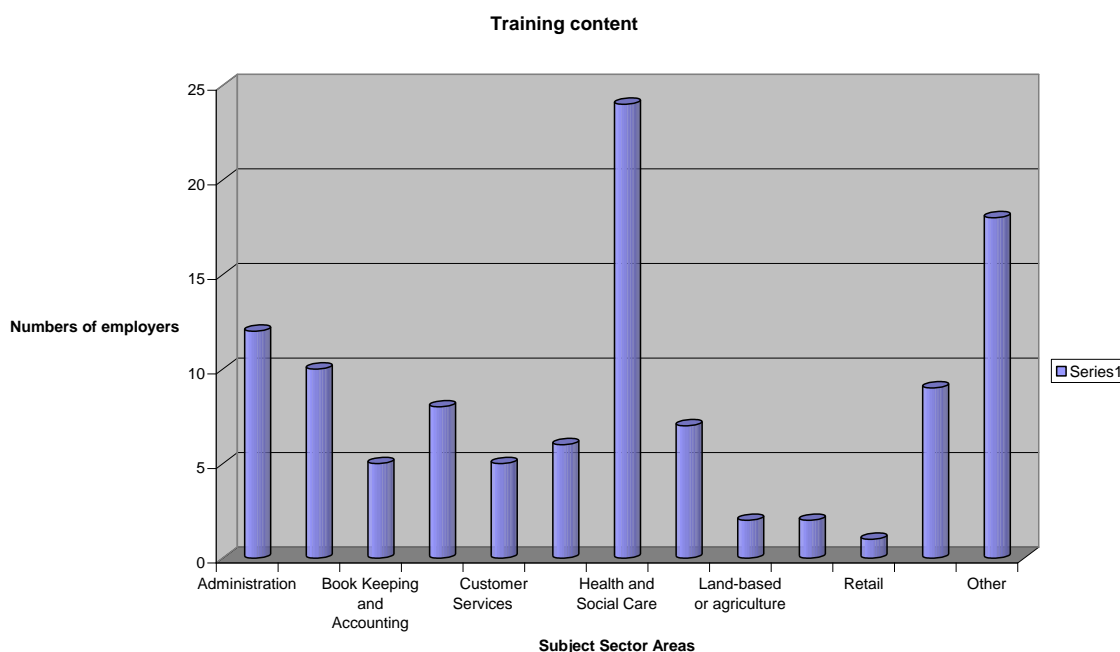


Figure 4 - Qualification level of training undertaken by employers surveyed in the last 2 years.

58. Analysis of areas/sectors in which training had been delivered showed that Health and Social Care was the most common. This may be in part due to the high turnover of staff in this sector, coupled with the statutory requirements for staff to have gained qualifications and updating of awards such as First Aid. Administration and Business Management along with Team Leading were also areas of training undertaken by a number of employers. A number of employers indicated other areas of training including Teaching Assistants, Veterinary Nursing, Animal Care, Contact Centre Operations, Architecture, Business Improvement and Employment Law.



**Figure 5 – Areas of skills in which training had been undertaken in the last 2 years.**

59. When asked how training providers were selected, the majority of employers (62%) indicated that they approached a previously used provider. A smaller proportion, around 30% indicated that they used Train to Gain or Business Link Skills Brokers, whilst only 6% indicated that they acted on the recommendation of another employer. Publicity materials received from training providers influenced choices for only around 14% of the respondents. Two employers had taken up training provision in response to telephone calls from training providers, whilst the remainder of those citing other sources indicated that they used parent company nominated providers or accessed local authority training provision. Professional body information on updating courses were also cited as useful and utilised to meet CPD needs.

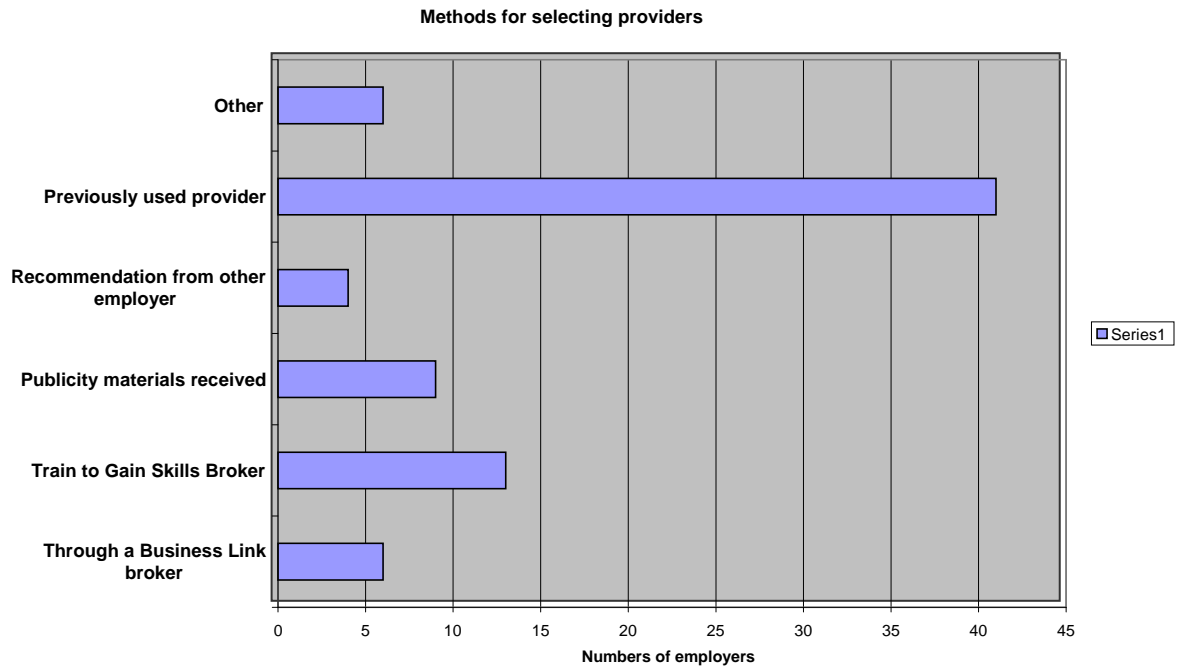


Figure 6 – Sources of information utilised by employers to access training provision.

60. The majority of employers who responded to preference of location for training, indicated that they preferred training delivery in their workplace. Not all respondents answered this question, and perhaps a third category indicating no preference should have been added. This finding is in line with other surveys that have been completed both nationally and regionally.

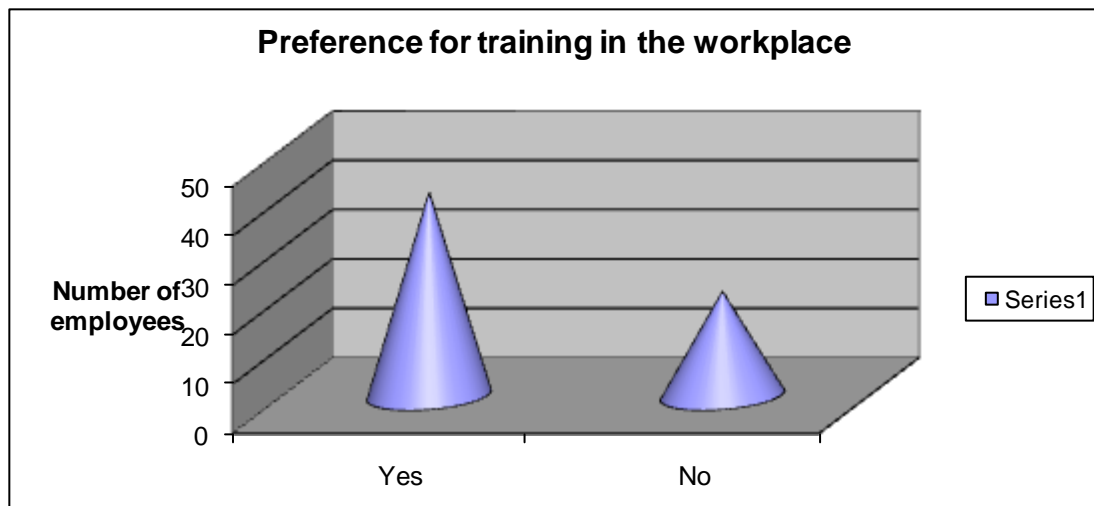


Figure 7 – Employer preference for location of training.

61. When asked if any training needs had proved difficult to meet, 33% of respondents indicated that they had experienced difficulties in accessing training provision. The range of areas cited included in-house training for NVQ 3 staff in the Care sector, NVQ3 for Construction personnel, Technical Plastics Processing, IT Technical Knowledge for sales personnel, Contact Centre Operations at Level 4, NVQs for site personnel working for the London

Underground, Child Protection, Wood Working Machine Skills, Food Handling and Hygiene, dental nursing CPD and Dementia Care. Six respondents failed to provide a response to this question.

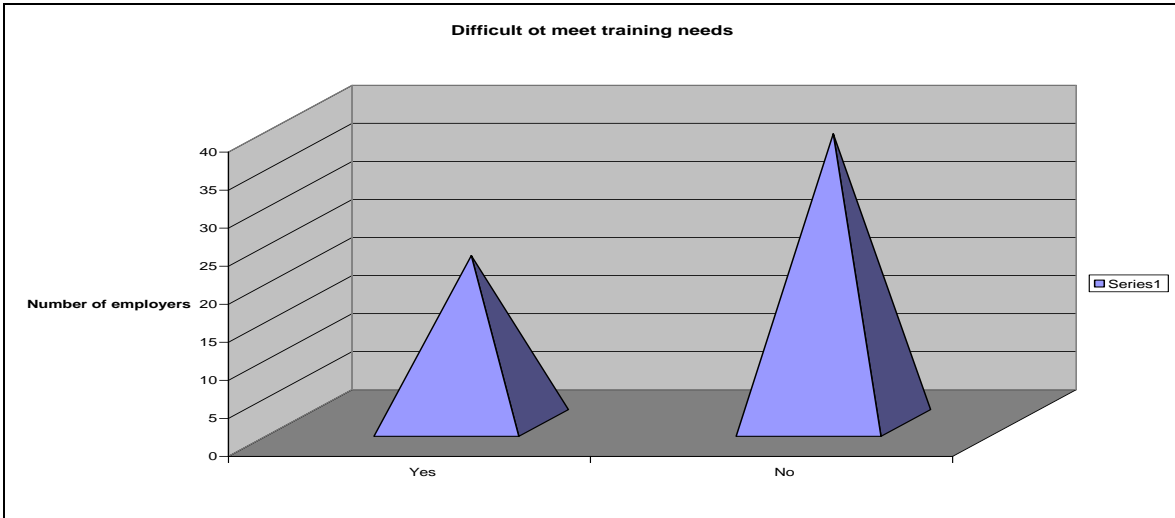


Figure 8- Employers with training needs that have proved difficult to meet.

62. When asked whether they would support staff to study or undertake training at higher levels, 36% of employers responded positively, whilst 12% indicated that either this was not relevant to their needs, or that they would not support higher levels training. However, 29% of responding employers did not give an answer to this question, and a further 27% indicated that they were unsure. Further research into this area would serve to clarify not only employer views as to the value of higher levels training, but also what if any barriers and constraints may exist.



Figure 9 - Employers response to supporting staff to engage with higher levels training or study.

63. A wide range of responses were received to the final two questions which asked employers about the nature of the CPD needs they for their managers and areas of training that might be of interest to them at higher levels.

<b>CPD Areas of possible interest to employers for their managers.</b>
Update with relevant Training
Basic & Mandatory Training & NVQs
Teaching Qualifications, IT Training
SupervisiOn, Management Skills, IT, Health & Safety
Staying up-to-date - best practice
HR in Employment Law/IIP, Procurement - Contract Negotiation
Sales Process
Legal Items, First Aid, Fire, Health & Safety.
Craft Trainers, Financial Awareness, Career Development
Financial awareness, Career Development
Construction Project Management
Medical Emergencies, Disinfection & Decontamination
Radiography & Radiation Protection
Management Courses in a cultural context
Business Management
Team Leading/Management
Health & Safety, HR, Animal Care
Budgeting for non-financial managers
Financial awareness, Conditions of Employment
Health & Safely,
Employment Law
Service, Team Leadership
NVQs in Care, Specialist areas e.g. Learning disabilities
Health & Safety, Catering Management, Book Keeping
Assessment - Employment Law
CMI Based
Updates on changes in the law, NVQ Level 4
MBA or similar
Changes in legislation updating
Communication Skills, People Management, Team Building
Managing People Skills
Skills around dental nursing - infection control, radiography
Security Industry specialist skills
Business Management, Sales & Marketing
Worked related for gas, oil, Electrical Regulation, Accounts
Engineering
Mental Health issues
Construction Skills updating
Data management, Education Developments, Preparing for Ofsted Inspection
Business Management
IT Skills
Sales, Health & Safety, IT, Management
Management Training

**Table 1 - Areas identified by employers linked to CPD for managers.**

64. A number of identified areas were linked to the sector in which the organisation operated, i.e. technical skills for engineering and construction companies. However, the majority of areas were linked to generic administration, management and development of businesses, ranging from management and administrative skills through to IT and knowledge of employment law. A matching pattern was found in the responses to identified areas of interest for higher levels training as shown in Table 2 below.

<b>Higher levels areas of interest</b>
NVQ 5 in Care
Teaching Degrees
Business Administration, Accounts
Sales & Marketing, Business Leadership
Health & Social Care
Training Trainers
Nursing Qualifications
RMA Level 4
NVQ 4, Leadership & Management (RMA)
Health & Safety, Accountancy
Administration
HNC Construction
FD in Education/Childhood Studies, Degree, PGCE
Management
Accounting
IT Skills

**Table 2 – identified areas of interest at Levels 4 and above**

65. As with many questionnaire surveys, the response level was small, with only 6.8% of employers contacted responding. However, the survey has revealed good levels of engagement with training amongst business and public sector organisations in Kent and Medway. Despite the difficult economic climate, employers do see training and CPD as being essential for the operational effectiveness of their organisations. Given that only 12% of respondents indicated that they would not support higher level training for their workforce, there would appear to be plenty of scope for universities and colleges to promote higher levels training and qualification opportunities. For those providers who have existing links with employers, raising awareness of provision would seem to be a worthwhile strategy, as employers have indicated that they prefer to work with known providers. Through partnerships between colleges and universities and with support from skills brokers, training needs should be further explored, reflecting employer needs for flexible, accessible and where possible, work based provision. With the advent of higher levels Train to Gain funding, employers may be more willing to meet the associated costs where they can see that both government and learner are also making a contribution and investment risk is essentially reduced.

### **iii) Summary of Employer Responses to interview questions.**

#### **Question 1: What kind of training or qualifications information makes a positive impact for your organisation?**

66. Employers indicated an interest in information which included reference to possible funding to support training, and that would support staff that needed to stay abreast of new developments. These may be linked to CPD requirements or to good practice and new industry based developments. A number of employers also specified that they would look for information that indicated providers would train staff in the workplace.
67. Information needed to be clear and relevant to the sector or to the types of additional training needs organisations may have, for example in administration, management and IT. Information also needed to clearly demonstrate the value to the organisation of train provision being offered (increasing productivity, efficiency or competitiveness). Information that made clear the cost of courses was also seen as positive.
68. Time for training was seen as a major consideration for most employers, and information on training provision that indicated it would be flexible, or could be undertaken through distance learning, learning in the workplace or on-line would be positively viewed.
69. Most employers felt that there was insufficient information from training providers specific to their sector or industry. Where there are statutory requirements for training and updating, then information should clear that training offered can meet this need. This was particularly the case with employers in the Care, Education and Construction sectors.

#### **Question 2: What information would you like to receive that is perhaps not at present readily available?**

70. Information on NVQs that could be undertaken solely through the workplace was cited frequently both in the Care sector and in relation to office and customer service skills. The Care sector also indicated a demand for Dementia courses in relation to medication and wound management.
71. As with the previous question employers emphasised the need for training information on new developments and practices, reflecting contemporary issues. Information should be transparent and indicate the value to the employer and where appropriate, set within the context of the sector or industry.
72. Several employers indicated an interest in part-time or distance learning provision around managing a business and financial awareness and skills,

with one requesting this within a cultural context. A number of employers indicated that business management provision set in the context of their own business would be of interest.

73. For three employers very technical training information was not readily available, one in Technical Plastics Processing through Blow and Injection Moulding, another looking for training for embalming and handling of bodies and the third looking for IT skills for Sales Staff. Dental practices indicated an interest in training that would meet the CPD requirements for Dental Nurses, including such areas as Radiation Protection and Decontamination.

**Question 3: How important is competitive costing of training?**

74. Almost all employers interviewed indicated that the cost of training was a key factor. Many employers when looking for qualifications also seek information as to whether funding is available. For some employers, particularly those in the Care sector, cost can be a governing factor with the priority being for Level 2 and Level 3 training governed by statutory requirements, much of which is fully funded. Care organisations also look to Local Authorities to provide free training in areas such as Elder Abuse and Moving and Handling. For employers who need staff to update their qualifications as part of statutory requirements, for example in the areas of First Aid and Health and Safety, competitively priced provision is a key factor in selecting a training provider.

75. For larger employers with a training budget, cost remains a factor and all are seeking transparent value. However, where specialist or bespoke training is a requirement, employers readily acknowledge that this may be expensive. Employers may be prepared to pay more to have provision tailored to their organisation's needs.

76. Employers were clear that training is seen for the most part as an investment in the business. Where there is a significant turnover of staff, the training is aimed to meeting regulatory requirements, but where staff turnover is more stable, costs are seen as part on an ongoing business investment strategy. In all cases, employers are looking at transparent value for money,

**Question 4: How important is it that your staff access accredited qualifications?**

77. Many employers felt this was important, particularly if linked to undertaking roles that are governed by statutory regulation, as is the case for those working in Education, Construction, Engineering and Care. A distinction was made between qualifications needed to undertake a role, and training which might put in place specific knowledge and skills to enhance performance.

78. For many employers training was linked to updating and enhancing performance in post. Not all training needs were seen as requiring accredited outcomes, though in the case of updating qualifications to maintain

registration, accreditation is vital, for example, Corgi registration for gas engineers, and for those working in Care where First Aid is a requirement.

79. Half the employers in the sample felt that staff gaining accredited outcomes and qualifications was a mark to quality of achievement and demonstrated they has acquired the skills and knowledge. They also felt that the content was controlled and that essential skills and knowledge would be covered. This was clearly the case for those needing technical knowledge and expertise which was regularly updated.
80. However, employers also noted that they need good quality training which may not necessarily be accredited, particularly where tailored to their specific organisation needs.

**Question 5: Is much of your training determined by regulatory requirements?**

81. The responses from employers varied by sector. For those in the Education, Construction, Engineering and Care sectors much of the training was governed by regulatory requirements. In other sectors the training requirements were linked to organisation needs, with key areas identified as Customers Service, Retail, Management, Accounting and Business Development.

**Question 6: What kind of continuing professional development is important for your managers?**

82. Many employers felt that continuing professional development was a key part of managers being able to do their jobs. In some cases this was identified as being linked to professional updating, where managers needed to be aware of changes in statutory regulations, as well as Health and Safety, and in maintaining the currency of their qualifications. Employers also identified CPD as being linked to individual manager's areas of interest and professional and career development. Employers acknowledged that investment in individual managers was of benefit not only in terms of enhanced performance, but also for retaining staff.
83. Project management was identified by several employers as an area for professional development, particularly those in the private sector. Planning of work was seen as critical to cost effectiveness and delivery of products to time and specification. Linked to this area was the need for general management training related to effective record keeping and business development.
84. Other areas identified as important for managers were employment law, recruitment, procurement and sales processes along with IT and technical

training related to the individual industries, for example, knowledge of radiation protection and decontamination for those in Dental Practices. Knowledge of employment law, team leading, supervision, customer services and business development were identified as important CPD requirements, and employers expressed interest in receiving information on training available. For those in with interests in the catering area, currency of knowledge related to good practices in food preparation and retail was seen as important.

**Question 7: What are your main priorities when it comes to deciding on who will deliver your training?**

85. Twenty five percent of employers interviewed indicated that they took advice from Train to Gain brokers, whilst 50% used training providers they had previously worked with. This proportion was roughly in line with the responses received for all questionnaires, where 62.12% of respondents indicated they would use a previous provider.

86. Funding was also identified as a key criterion, where providers or brokers who could advise on possible sources of funding were viewed very positively. Work-based learning which could be undertaken independently and supported by training providers was seen as a priority, particularly amongst employers in the Care, Education and Public sectors.

87. Amongst the main priorities employers identified were:

- Cost and flexibility of training provision to meet organisation needs;
- Quality and reliability with training that is fit for purpose;
- Delivery on employer premises or accessible local training (important for 81% of those interviewed and 62% of all respondents);
- Trainers who are knowledgeable about latest developments within the sector or industry;
- Trainers who have been recommended by other organisations in the same sector or business, or by reputable skills brokers;
- Have industry recognised standards for training;
- Local providers where possible – with a good reputation;
- Provision that can fit around staff availability;
- Understand the needs of the staff and the industry;
- Can offer ongoing work based training.

**Question 8: What 3 things would you look for in a good training or qualifications provider?**

88. Many employers identified factors similar to those above, namely flexibility, cost and delivery on the employers' premises. However in addition a number of other factors were identified including:

- Flexible and prompt delivery to meet identified needs and staff availability;

- Competitive prices – good value for money;
- Good range of resources to support training, including technical resources;
- Good training staff who work well with employees;
- Providers who can deliver exactly what has been asked for;
- Good knowledge and understanding of the needs of the sector;
- Good range of accredited programmes as well as bespoke provision;
- Local so that a good working relationship can be developed;
- Approved by sector bodies or key manufacturers – certified trainers;
- Efficient and effective delivery;
- Good reputation for quality provision;
- Clear information about what will be delivered and how;
- Good success rates for accredited training with high standards achieved.

**Question 9: How do you judge whether training delivery has been effective?**

89. Employers felt that the views of staff were central to judging whether training had been effective. Many employers wanted to know whether the staff had enjoyed the training and whether they felt they had benefited. The impact on morale was an important factor, as this would impact directly on staff turnover. Completion and success rates were also a factor, as training for qualifications, particularly those with regulatory requirements, would indicate effectiveness of the training provider.

90. The value of training was seen as directly linked to staff's ability to perform their jobs, often informally monitored, but also formally reviewed through staff appraisals. Employers felt that effective training should increase individual efficiency and ability to handle day to day work and problem solving. For those working in technical fields, staff ability to deal with queries and technical questions was essential, and linked directly to the evaluation of training.

91. In addition, a number of employers also asked their staff to complete training evaluation forms, and utilised this information to inform future training decisions. The monitoring forms also provided information as to whether the training had covered all the areas the employers had indicated as needed.

**Question 10: Do you feel training and professional development of staff is critical to the success of your organisation?**

92. Most employers responded that training and professional development of staff was necessary for their organisation. Some employers linked this directly to statutory requirements for maintaining registration, whilst others felt it was central to maintaining professional standards and the quality of services or products.

93. Staff training and development was seen by employers as applying both to technical/professional staff as well as those in a non-technical or administrative and support functions. One employer notably highlighted that if staff in any area did not have the skills to do their job well, the whole business would suffer. Training and professional development was seen as an investment in the business, and recognised the critical role all staff play in making a business grow and maintain a successful profile.

94. In sectors such as health and education, staff development was frequently linked to CPD requirements to maintain professional status. This allowed staff to expand their expertise and to stay abreast of new developments and best practices.

**Question 11: Have you liaised with any universities in relation to your training or CPD needs?**

95. Of the employers interviewed, 13 (81%) had not liaised with any universities. A number had experience of working with colleges and two indicated that they would be interested in business related programmes to help with leadership and development. Only three employers had experience of working with universities, one for education programmes, one for business courses and one for specialist training for dental practitioners.

**Question 12: Are you familiar with Foundation Degrees?**

96. Of the 16 employers interviewed, 9 had heard of or were familiar with foundation degrees. Three indicated that they may have an interest in exploring Foundation Degree options further, one in Care, one in Hospitality and one in Business Management. Two employers had staff undertaking Foundation Degrees, one in Early Years and another as a Teaching Assistant. Seven of the employers (43%) had not heard of Foundation Degrees.

**Question 13: Are you likely to have staff training needs at higher levels in the next 2 years?**

97. The majority of employers felt that they would have higher level training needs over the next two years. Only two employers indicated that they thought this would not be of relevance to them. This level of interest was substantially greater than that received through questionnaire responses alone, though 27% of respondents responded 'don't know', which may indicate an uncertainty about what is meant by higher levels. Of the questionnaire sample, only 12% responded with a clear 'no', which directly corresponds to the 12% of interviewed employers who felt they had no higher level training requirements.

98. Management and business related provision were the most frequently cited areas for higher levels training and qualifications. Finance and Accounting along with Sales and Marketing, Leadership and Employment Law were also mentioned by more than one employer. Other provision included Engineering and Maintenance, Project Management and Contracting.

**Question 14: Would you be interested in having information as to how universities could assist with your higher levels training needs, including work based learning?**

99. The employers with higher levels training needs were all interested in receiving information from universities. However, many wanted flexible and work-based learning programmes, or at least part-time provision. The costs of provision would need to be made clear, and in the current economic climate this was felt to be a major factor. Employers also made it clear that they could not release staff from significant periods of time to attend classes, and would prefer part-time, work based or distance learning with some direct support on a less frequent basis. Flexibility and accessibility were key factors.

100. What has clearly emerged from the interviews is that employers would be interested in hearing more about higher level training and qualification opportunities, but only if these are available through flexible or work based learning provision. Cost of provision is an important factor, as is the transparency of the value that can be added to the organisation, both in terms of enhancement of skills and employee performance, and in developing staff for greater responsibilities and to support staff retention.

101. The employers interviewed were interested in working with higher education providers, but only if training could be shown to be cost effective and flexible and related to their specific business needs. In the first instance their requirements may not be for full qualifications, though a number expressed an interest in part-time or distance learning provision. The key message that has emerged from the employers interviewed is a lack of knowledge or understanding as to how they could work with higher levels and higher education providers. HEIs and colleges need to demonstrate to employers that they are able to offer tailored provision in the same way as training providers working with Level 2 and Level 3 needs. HEIs and colleges need to assist employers in identifying appropriate training and qualifications through organisational needs analysis, building a picture of where higher levels training provision could fill skills and knowledge gaps, and support improved staff performance and organisation productivity.

## D. Conclusions

102. Many employers, particularly SMEs that have little experience of graduates or of higher education are unaware of developments that have taken place in the HE sector<sup>18</sup>. Some may have outdated perceptions of universities and colleges as only being able to provide formal programmes and qualifications which are not sufficiently relevant to the employers needs. These organisations rarely have the opportunity to discover what higher education has to offer and do not receive much in the way of information that is relevant to their development needs, as compared to marketing information received from training providers and skills brokers relating to Level 2 and Level 3 provision. In addition, many employers are unable to assess how their needs might articulate with HE, and are not familiar with the language employed by higher education providers.
103. The negative perceptions held by employers of HE include key elements of:
- Relevance of provision;
  - Lack of flexibility of delivery;
  - High costs both in terms of development and delivery;
  - Limited returns on investment.
104. These concerns are frequently compounded by concerns over retention of staff after completion of training and qualifications and lack of substantive evidence of the benefits to be gained by the organisation. Promoting a better understanding of the value of higher education, whether in terms of awards or full qualifications or bespoke training, will be crucial if negative perceptions are to be overcome, and employers are to view HE providers as providers of choice for the learning and development needs of their workforce.
105. Sharing an understanding of expectations of provision by both higher education providers and employers is a first essential step. Good communications and commitment to devising effective solutions to learning and skills needs is required by both parties for the effective design and delivery of new programmes. Expectations need to be carefully managed and business development managers can play a key role in handling the cultural differences and managing employer expectations.
106. The research undertaken with Kent and Medway providers and employers has identified key requirements in line with broader research findings. Employers seek provision that provides flexibility of content and delivery modes, enabling staff to undertake training to fit in with work patterns and

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<sup>18</sup> Higher education: what works and why. Connor, H. (2007) Council for Industry and Higher Education

other commitments. Provision needs to be provided locally or in the workplace, and linked transparently to meeting employees learning needs as well as those of the organisation as a whole. Employers needed to perceive training to be directly relevant to the enhancement of performance and organisational productivity.

107. Many universities are now providing work-based learning, where the workplace becomes the context for the application of learning and the content of programmes is driven by the nature of work and gaps in knowledge and competence, rather than by academic subject disciplines. In this way the higher education experience becomes multidisciplinary, relevant, contextual and meaningful to the work context.

108. The good practice identified by both training providers and employers shows a high degree of convergence. Providers have identified good practice in engaging with employers as including features of:

- Effective marketing that targets employers with information relevant to their sector needs and to broader business development;
- Use of Case Studies in publicity materials to demonstrate how training has been of value to other similar organisations;
- Development of links with Skills Brokers, ensuring they have a clear understanding of the expertise and provision that could be offered by higher levels providers;
- Rapid follow to contacts passed on or enquiries received;
- Organisation Needs Analysis approach to establish the spectrum of training needs and clarify what may be needed rather than what has been initially identified by the employer as wanted;
- Clear focus on skills and competency requirements in the first instance, to meet identified skills and knowledge gaps, rather than promoting qualifications taken from existing provision;
- Clear advice on funding and costs of provision, which demonstrates cost effectiveness;
- Responsive provision based on employer and employee input;
- Work-based or workplace training provision that fits with the demands of the workplace;
- Flexible modes of delivery to meet employer requirements;
- Quick delivery of provision which fits with employer priorities;
- Good account management, with named contacts to help build a successful rapport with the employer;
- Transparency of value of provision, with identified benefits to employers and employees;
- Good quality monitoring of employer and employee satisfaction with provision delivered.

109. The good practice approaches identified by employers also highlighted key areas of:
- Costs and funding information that is clear;
  - Work-based or workplace learning;
  - Sector relevant information that can be easily understood;
  - Clear evidence of benefits the organisation can expect from training;
  - Flexible provision to fit around work commitments;
  - Information linked to new developments and practices;
  - Accredited provision especially in sectors with statutory requirements;
  - Offer of business improvement skills;
  - Information linked to management training, customer services, financial management and planning.
110. The importance of good initial contacts was also highlighted by employers as they valued a clear and quick response to enquiries. The majority of employers indicated, that where possible they would use a provider they had worked with before. Further in choosing a provider, employers indicated that they would take in to consideration elements of costs, flexibility, quality and reliability; workplace delivery, expertise of the training provider, and demonstrated ability to understand the needs of their organisation. Further, the effectiveness of provision would be judged through the satisfaction of staff that had undergone training, impact on performance whether measures were formal or informal and evidence through formal evaluations.
111. Employers indicated that they had had little engagement with HEIs in relation to their training needs. The majority of employers interviewed (69%) indicated that they would be interested in receiving information as to how HEIs could help meet their training needs and would support staff to undertake relevant higher level training and/or qualifications.
112. In summary, national and regional studies have demonstrated that positive progress is being made by HE institutions in engaging with the workforce development agenda. However, a number of challenges remain to be fully resolved. These include:
1. **Engaging with employers** – effective engagement requires HE and employers to develop a common language so that both partners can begin to build a shared understanding of each other's needs and wants, and in doing so manage expectations as to what is and what is not possible as part of a 'client' centred approach
  2. **Market building** – HEIs need to actively engage in building a market in expertise and provision that can meeting employers' higher level skills needs.
  3. **Funding** – providing cost-effective learning solutions that are tailored to sector and individual employer requirements. This includes raising awareness of co-funded approaches and other funding options.

4. **Clear communication**, including internal communication mechanisms for working within/across structures of an HE institution to fulfill an employer's higher level skills needs, as well as customer support services focused on the employer as the client.
5. **Capacity and capability** – clear systems for establishing and monitoring institutions capacity to respond to increasing levels of demand from employers.
6. **Standards** – maintaining academic standards but ensuring quality assurance procedures are sufficiently responsive to timescales expected by an employer.
7. **Facilities and specialist knowledge and equipment** – which provides for flexible provision and workplace learning delivery. Access to specialist facilities can impact on the method and location of learning delivery, which may ultimately affect the costs to an employer. Care also needs to be taken that there is compatibility between the equipment used in training and that used by learners in the workplace.

111. Interestingly the barriers to higher levels identified by employer and training providers were linked to employers being targeted with too much information, much of which was not seen as relevant, delays in accessing provision, the high financial costs of some provision and the potential loss of staff once training had been completed. Most of these barriers are outside the influence of universities and colleges, who need to find strategies for ensuring their information stands out from the rest and is perceived as relevant, solutions based and attractive.

## Recommendations

Universities and colleges wishing to engage with employers to meet higher levels skills needs should build on the good practice as identified by training providers, skills brokers and employers through:

- ❖ Quick and effective communications;
- ❖ Quick and reliable identification of needs and provision to meet the skills gap;
- ❖ Responsive provision flexibly delivered, based on employer agreed solutions and in line with employer time-frames;
- ❖ Good account management that tracks and supports employer provision;
- ❖ Appropriate expertise – at all stages of the process from diagnostics through to delivery and evaluation;
- ❖ Transparent value - making clear the benefits of the training being offered;
- ❖ Competitive pricing – showing value for money and including advice on funding where appropriate;
- ❖ Good marketing strategies that are based on sector and employer needs, utilising local market information;
- ❖ Clear progression routes such that employers and learners know what further training and qualification options exist.
- ❖ Quality provision – but at the right price.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Questions used as basis for interviews with training providers and Skills South East.

#### Questions for providers and skills brokers.

1. How do you as an organisation go about liaising with employers to ascertain their training needs?
2. How do you ensure that employers know about the services/provision you can offer?
3. How much of your provision is at level 3 and also at level 4 and above?
4. Are most of the employers you deal with seeking accredited qualifications?
5. When training provision required has been identified, how quickly thereafter generally is delivery put in place?
6. Is most delivery undertaken on employer premises or in your own facilities?
7. Once training has been completed, do you follow up with the employer as to further training that may be appropriate, for example at the next level up?
8. How do you monitor the levels of learner and employer satisfaction?
9. What do you think constitutes good practice in dealing with employers to ensure their needs are met?
10. What barriers have you identified to employer engagement?
11. Would you be prepared to take part in a Kent & Medway LLN survey of some of your learners – questionnaire to be agreed with yourselves and circulated at LLN expense?
12. It would be useful to gain some first hand feedback from employers as to their concepts of best practice in identifying and delivering training. Would you be willing to provide some employer contacts that we could follow up?

## Appendix 2.

### Postal Questionnaire sent to 1,000 employers in Kent and Medway

Name of Organisation..... Number of staff.....

(Please tick more than one box for each question if appropriate)

#### 1. Please indicate the levels of training your staff have undertaken in the last 2 years.

- Level 2 NVQ or Certificate
- Level 3 NVQ or Certificate/Diploma
- Level 4 or above qualifications e.g. HNC/D, Foundation Degree\*, egg Management, Business, etc.
- Other – please give title:

#### 2. Please indicate the subject or content of training over the last 2 years

- Administration
- Business Management
- Book Keeping and Accounting
- Construction
- Customer Services
- Engineering
- Health and Social Care
- IT
- Land-based or agriculture
- Leisure and Tourism
- Retail
- Team Leading
- Other- please state.

#### 3. How did you select the training provider?

- Through a Business Link broker
- Train to Gain Skills Broker
- Publicity materials received
- Recommendation from other employer
- Previously used provider
- Other, please specify:

#### 4. Do you want/prefer training to be delivered on your premises?

Yes  No

5. Are there any training needs that have provided difficult to meet? Yes  No

If yes, please indicate areas or types of training.

6. Would you encourage/ support staff to undertake training or study at Higher Education level (above Level 3)? Yes  No   
Don't Know

7. What kind of continuing professional development is important for you and your managers?

8. Please indicate below any areas of training your organisation would be interested in at higher levels (above Level 3).

9. Would you be willing to participate further in this research via a short interview with the researcher?

Yes  No

If yes, please attach/provide contact details.

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Please return to the Lifelong Learning Network in the envelope provided.

### **Appendix 3.**

#### **Questions for employer interviews.**

1. What kind of training or qualifications information makes a positive impact for your organisation?
2. What information would you like to receive that is perhaps not at present readily available?
3. How important is competitive costing of training?
4. How important is it that your staff gain accredited qualifications?
5. Is much of your training determined by regulatory requirements?
6. What kind of continuing professional development is important for your managers?
7. What are your main priorities when it comes to deciding on who will deliver your training?
8. What 3 things would you look for in a good training or qualifications provider?
9. How do you judge whether training delivery has been effective?
10. Do you feel training and professional development of staff is critical to the success of your organisation?
11. Have you liaised with any universities in relation to your training or CPD needs?
12. Are you familiar with Foundation Degrees?
13. Are you likely to have staff training needs at higher levels in the next 2 years?
14. Would you be interested in having information as to how universities could assist with your higher levels training needs, including work based learning?

## Appendix 4

### Results of Employer survey – all returned questionnaires

<b>Responses from Employer Survey</b>		
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>	
<b>1. Staff Training in last 2 years</b>		
Level 2 NVQ or Certificate	49	74.24%
Level 3 NVQ or Certificate/Diploma	36	54.55%
Level 4 or above qualifications	19	28.79%
Other – please give title:	2	3.03%
CIPD		
MBA		
<b>2. Content of Training over last 2 yrs</b>		
Administration	12	18.18%
Business Management	10	15.15%
Book Keeping and Accounting	5	7.57%
Construction	8	12.12%
Customer Services	5	7.57%
Engineering	6	9.09%
Health and Social Care	24	36.36%
IT	7	10.60%
Land-based or agriculture	2	3.03%
Leisure and Tourism	2	3.03%
Retail	1	1.52%
Team Leading	9	13.64%
Other- please state.		
NVQ Teaching Assistants, First Aid, NLP, Team Teaching		
Child care		
National Cert Dental Nursing		
Workplace Skills - Roofing & Tiling		
Health & Safety, HR, Employment Law		
Veterinary Nursing		
Plant Maintenance & Plant Operations		
Architecture		
Employment Law		
Education		
Catering		

Animal Care		
Contact Centre Operation		
Child care		
Business Improvement		
Age Concern Training		
Health & safety		
Training Officer		
<b>3. Methods used for selecting training provider</b>		
Through a Business Link broker	6	9.09%
Train to Gain Skills Broker	13	19.67%
Publicity materials received	9	13.64%
Recommendation from other employer	4	6.06%
Previously used provider	41	62.12%
Other, please specify:	6	9.09%
Parent Company nominated provider		
Local Authority provider		
Adult Education provider		
Professional Information		
Phone calls from training providers	2	3.03%
Training Officer choice		
<b>4. Preference for training on own premises</b>		
Yes	41	62.12%
No	21	31.32%
<b>5. Have training needs proved difficult to meet.</b>		
Yes	22	33.33%
No	38	57.57%
In house NVQ 3 for staff who can't attend College.		
Technical Plastics Processing - Blow & Injection Molding		
IT technical knowledge for sales personnel. Child Protection & contemporary issues		
Contact Centre Operations Level 4		
Health & social Care/Development of Children		
NVQs for site personnel working on site in London Underground		
Child Protection		
NVQ 3 from NVQ2		
CPD 50 hours for dental nurses		
NVQ 4		
Electrician		
Wood working machine skills		
Food handling & food hygiene - kitchen & severy staff		
CSCS NVQ level 3		
Dementia: Wound Care		

<b>6. Would encourage staff to train/study at higher levels</b>		
Yes	24	36.36%
No	8	12.12%
Don't know	15	27.27%
<b>7. Nature of CPD for managers</b>		
Update with relevant Training		
Basic & Mandatory Training & NVQa		
Teaching Qualifications, IT Training		
Supervision, Management Skills, IT, Health & Safety		
Staying up-to-date - best practice		
HR in Employment Law/IIP, Procurement - Contract Negotiation		
Sales Process		
Legal Items, First Aid, Fire, Health & Safety.		
Craft Trainers, Financial Awareness, Career Development		
Financial awareness, Career Development		
Construction Project Management		
Medical Emergencies, Disinfection & Decontamination		
Radiography & Radiation Protection		
Management Courses in a cultural context		
Business Management		
Team Leading/Management		
Health & Safety, HR, Animal Care		
Budgeting for non-financial managers		
Financial awareness, Conditions of Employment		
Health & Safety,		
Employment Law		
Service, Team Leadership		
NVQs in Care, Specialist areas e.g. Learning disabilities		
Health & Safety, Catering Management, Book Keeping		
Assessment - Employment Law		
CMI Based		
Updates on changes in the law, NVQ Level 4		
MBA or similar		
Changes in legislation updating		
Communication Skills, People Management, Team Building		
Managing People Skills		
Skills around dental nursing - infection control, radiography		
Security Industry specialist skills		
Business Management, Sales & Marketing		
Worked related for gas, oil, Electrical Regulation, Accounts		
Engineering		
Mental Health issues		
Construction Skills updating		
Data management, Education Developments, Preparing for Ofsted Inspection		
Business Management		
IT Skills		
Sales, Health & Safety, IT, Management		

Management Training		
<b>8. Identified areas of training of interest at Level 4/5/6</b>		
Just completed NVQ 4		
NVQ 5		
Teaching Degree		
Business Admin, Accounts/Admin Assistant		
Sales & Marketing, Business Leadership		
Health & Social Care		
Training Trainers		
Nursing Qualifications		
RMA Level 4		
NVQ 4, Leadership & Management (RMA)		
Health & Safety, Accountancy		
Administration		
HNC Construction		
FD in Education/Childhood Studies, Degree, PGCE		
Management		
Accounting		
IT Skills		
Management		

## Appendix 5

### Results from survey from employers who agreed to a follow-up interview

<b>Responses from Employer Survey - interviewed</b>		
<b>Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>1. Staff Training in last 2 years</b>		
Level 2 NVQ or Certificate	13	81.25%
Level 3 NVQ or Certificate/Diploma	10	62.50%
Level 4 or above qualifications	5	31.25%
Other – please give title:		
<b>2. Content of Training over last 2 yrs</b>		
Administration	4	25%
Business Management	3	18.75%
Book Keeping and Accounting	2	12.50%
Construction	1	6.25%
Customer Services	4	25%
Engineering		
Health and Social Care	5	31.25%
IT	4	25%
Land-based or agriculture	1	6.25%
Leisure and Tourism	1	6.25%
Retail	2	12.50%
Team Leading		
Other- please state.		
NVQ Teaching Assistants, First Aid, NLP, Team Teaching		
Child care		
National Cert Dental Nursing		
Workplace Skills - Roofing & Tiling		
Health & Safety, HR, Employment Law		
Employment Law		
Education and teaching related		
Catering		
Business Improvement		
Age Concern Training		
Health & safety		
<b>3. Methods used for selecting training provider</b>		
Through a Business Link broker		
Train to Gain Skills Broker	4	25%
Publicity materials received	1	6.25%
Recommendation from other employer	2	12.50%

Previously used provider	8	50%
Other, please specify:		
Parent Company nominated provider		
Local Authority provider		
Training Officer choice	1	6.25%
<b>4. Preference for training on own premises</b>		
Yes	13	81.25%
No	3	18.75%
<b>5. Have training needs proved difficult to meet.</b>		
Yes	9	56.25%
No	6	37.50%
In house NVQ 3 for staff who can't attend College.		
Technical Plastics Processing - Blow & Injection Molding		
IT technical knowledge for sales personnel. Child Protection & contemporary issues		
Technical skills for funeral business		
Contact Centre Operations Level 4		
Child Protection		
CPD 50 hours for dental nurses		
NVQ 4 Care		
Dementia: Wound Care		
<b>6. Would encourage staff to train/study at higher levels</b>		
Yes	11	68.75%
No	2	12.50%
Don't know	4	25%
<b>7. Nature of CPD for managers</b>		
Basic & Mandatory Training & NVQs		
Teaching Qualifications, IT Training		
SupervisiOn, Management Skills, IT, Health & Safety		
Staying up-to-date - best practice		
HR in Employment Law/IIP, Procurement - Contract Negotiation		
Sales Process		
Legal Items, First Aid, Fire, Health & Safety.		
Craft Trainers, Financial Awareness, Career Development		
Construction Project Management		
Medical Emergencies, Disinfection & Decontamination		
Radiography & Radiation Protection		
Management Courses in a cultural context		
Business Management		
Team Leading/Management		
Health & Safety,		
Health & Safety, Catering Management, Book Keeping		
Communication Skills, People Management, Team Building		

Managing People Skills		
Skills around dental nursing - infection control, radiography		
Business Management, Sales & Marketing		
Construction Skills updating		
IT Skills		
Sales, Health & Safety, IT, Management		
Management Training		
<b>8. Identified areas of training of interest at Level 4/5/6</b>		
NVQ 5		
Teaching Degree		
Business Admin, Accounts/Admin Assistant		
Sales & Marketing, Business Leadership		
Health & Social Care		
Training Trainers		
RMA Level 4		
NVQ 4, Leadership & Management (RMA)		
Administration		
Management		

## Appendix 6

### Notes of meeting with train providers and skills brokers

#### Notes of meeting with manager from Skills South East held on 19th November 2008

1. Skills South East has a target of 15,000 learner starts for the current year to the end of March 09. The target for the following year is 25,000 learner starts. The team is currently heavily engaged in trying to meet these targets and maintain momentum.
2. The methods used to make employers aware of the Train to Gain and brokerage offered by Skills South East include:
  - National Advertising Campaign and Regional/Local Adverts;
  - Sector Specific Campaigns;
  - Local teams working in sectors who undertake research with Sector Skills Councils and larger employers to identify broader sector training requirements, e.g. through case studies, so producing a toolkit for the skills brokers to use with employers;
  - Brokers are given a list of contacts to work with and encouraged to use local networks;
  - Building links with partners, e.g. Business Link and any other body working with employers;
  - Word of mouth, building links with Chambers of Commerce, and where appropriate paying the Chambers to promote Skills South East and Train to Gain;
  - Contracting with telesales organisations;
  - Own call centre staff for monitoring calls and making calls in connection with campaigns;
  - Holding events to raise awareness of Train to Gain, e.g. Kent Employers Event to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> November to raise awareness of training available and funding;
  - Use of breakfast meetings, which have proved popular with employers.
3. Local networks are important to engaging with employers and also with providers who can offer specialist provision. These providers can also identify training needs that they do not have the expertise to offer, and pass these on to Skills South East who will identify providers on behalf of the employer.
4. Once contact has been made with an employer, the process then becomes employer led. Brokers will contact the employer and agree a meeting to undertake Organisation Needs Analysis to identify such elements as:
  - Where the organisation/business is located in the market and direction or position it wishes to move to;
  - What existing training has been undertaken;
  - Recruitment profile;
  - SWOT analysis – often seen to work well.
5. Once the diagnostics have been completed, employers receive feedback on key issues against their targets and the related skills needs. Linking of training solutions to business needs is the essential

outcome. The critical skill for the broker is being able to ask the right questions and establish what is needed as opposed to what may initially have been wanted.

6. The key selling point for Skills South East is impartiality, and the fact they can identify training providers for the employer who may be appropriate. Employers respond positively to being able to choose what they want and who they prefer to deliver the training, and the fact there is no pressure to buy any particular service or product. Skills South East can also provide information on additional solutions where appropriate. However, some providers can become defensive if they feel the information provided by Skills South East is a threat to business that they see as their own territory.
7. Where there is no provision in place, Skills South East will provide details of 3 training providers who may be able to meet the needs, and direct employers to quality websites. This strategy complies with the strict guidelines set in place by the LSC.
8. Skills Brokers need to build a relationship and rapport with the employers they are working with and to build trust. In many cases the brokers can become virtual training managers. Whilst Skills Brokers may have targets to meet, the challenge is not just filling NVQ or Apprenticeship places, but to meet training requirements identified in the most appropriate way to satisfy the employer. This may mean that training may be bespoke with no public funding support, but where possible accredited qualifications are recommended, including Skills for Life. Brokers need to have an empathy with the business or employer such that they can see the bigger picture. For example, an employer approached Skills South East wanting Health & Safety training for staff, but was adamant that he did not want NVQs. Once the broker had explained the content and associated funding and how this could meet the training needs in a cost effective manner, the employer was happy to sign up 25 staff to NVQ training. This illustrates how brokers must be good at interpreting information provided by the employer and being able to link it to a sound business case, taking into account factors such as time and costs and preferences of those learners undertaking the training.
9. The ability to respond quickly to employers is important, as well as being able to manage the client's expectations. If brokers or providers do not act quickly, the client will lose interest and momentum. Skills South East have improved in this area recently and are now able to respond very quickly to all enquiries. Brokers respond to enquiries within their own geographic areas, and normally do so within 2 working days, with the objective of a meeting within 10 days, if possible. For employers with less than 10 employees (micro SMEs), brokers will try and undertake a training diagnostic over the phone. The on-line centre to support this approach is based at Burgess Hill. With larger employers, diagnostics are undertaken in face-to-face meetings. The call centres also respond to other enquiries, for example an employer seeking information about providers who can deliver 4 day First Aid Training. This is classified as a non-diagnostic engagement.
10. Brokers need to be aware that training providers may not always sell the employers the most appropriate course but rather what they feel they can offer. For example, SEEDA referred Skills South East to a large company to discuss their training requirement, have talked to one of the senior directors. It soon became apparent, however, that the HR manager in the company had had discussions with a local FE College about training needs. There was a potential conflict of interest, as whilst the FEC could meet some of the training needs, they could not deliver in other areas such

as Business Improvement Skills. Care needs to be taken to ensure the whole picture is clear before recommending any solutions.

11. If no provider in the area or region can offer the training required, then Skills South East will contact the SSC or Awarding Bodies and try and identify out of region providers.
12. Tracking of levels of satisfaction is undertaken by the LSC. The statistics for the last month indicate the 94% of employers reported that they were more than satisfied with the service they had received. At a local level, the area manager is responsible for monitoring quality of service through:
  - Job shadowing;
  - Quality Audits – including completion rates;
  - Random calls to employers.
13. Successful employer engagement can depend on a range of factors including:
  - Setting clear expectations;
  - Rapid and efficient responses to enquires;
  - Following up and ensuring delivery against promises;
  - Identifying clearly what is needed and ensuring brokers work with employers to access and monitor training;
  - Excellence of service, including good liaison, resolving tensions and following up on any problems.
14. Key barriers or challenges to employer engagement include:
  - Employers not fully understanding what can be offered;
  - Complaints about Train to Gain, such as employers being bombarded with enquiries from providers with Train to Gain contracts which then impacts on the Skills South East Brokerage;
  - Damage to reputation through non positive experiences that employers may have had or heard of in the past.
15. At present most training being brokered is at Levels 2 & 3, with very little at Level 4 or above. Many employers need to have their understanding of higher levels improved with good quality clear information as to provision and the value in business terms. Courses or provision also needs to be made flexible with a clear credit basis – employers can then access what the need for to meet short-term requirements and build on this in the longer term. The value to the employer must be made transparent.
16. HEIs need to raise awareness amongst employers as to what is available at higher levels, what the duration of provision is and how quickly and flexibly it can be put in place. One way to do this may be to hold a series of events, or perhaps include some aspect of this in the Skills South East events.

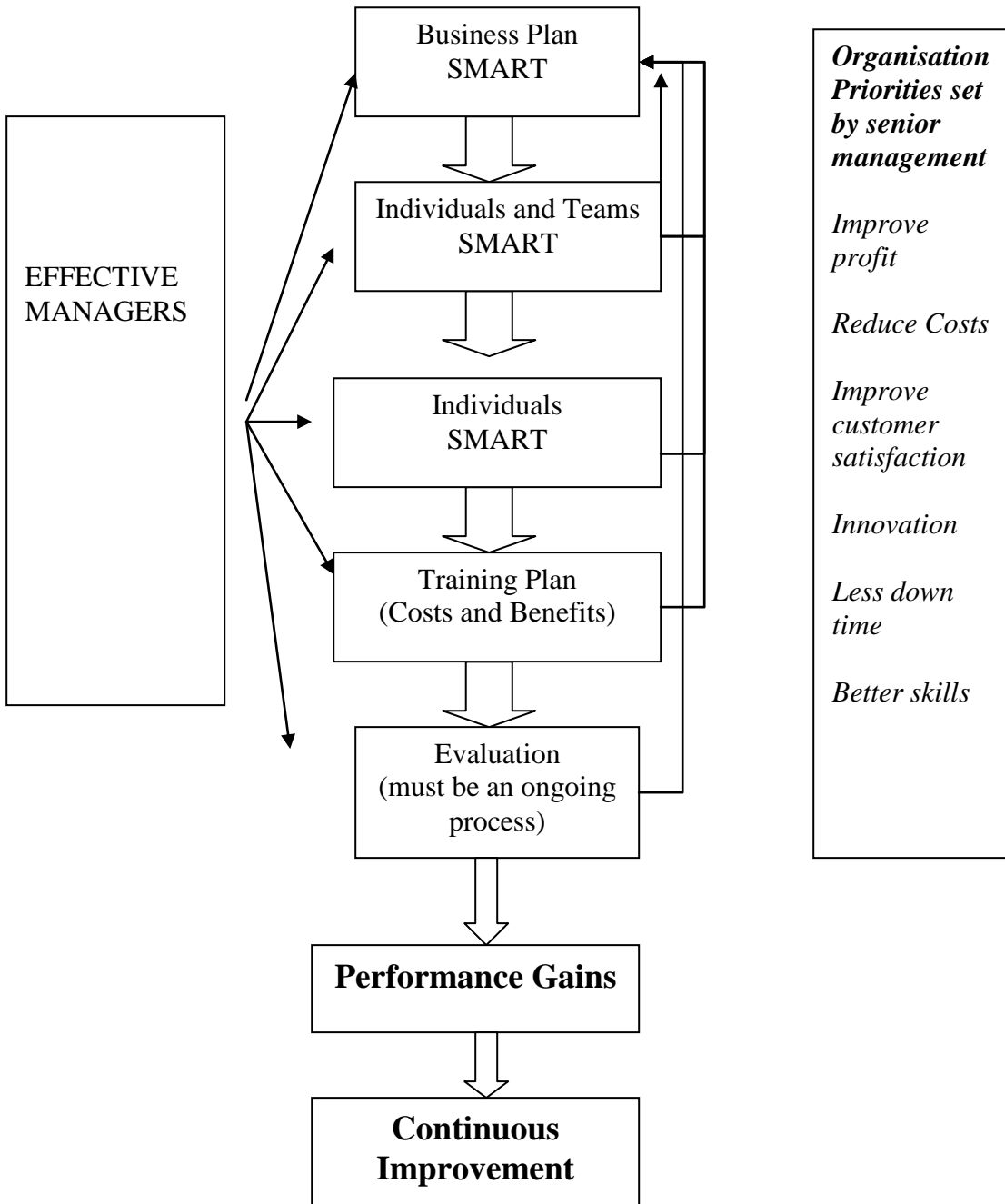
## Notes of meeting with manager working with larger employers from Skills South East held on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2009

1. New credit based funding for units have supported engagement in training, but this is only available for companies with 250 employees or less. John Denham brought this concession forward in response to employer needs, and is linked to what are termed 'business critical skills' such as payroll, customer services, business effectiveness, etc. Uptake has been slow, often as a result of problems deliver poses for providers.
2. Delivery in colleges can also be an issue – managers in large companies do not have time to spare to go to college, and some view taking classes in college as carrying something of a stigma, particularly in the case of large companies. Such managers often prefer to have bespoke CPD, and often want well known experts to come in and deliver workshops or specialist training. (*This could well be a market place for HE providers*).
3. There are distinct segments in the market, including:
  - Skills delivered quickly, for example a credit controller who was not pushing for payments – given assertiveness training and them was able to improve the cash flow = quick fix.
  - Succession Planning – longer engagement.
  - Certificated pathways and qualifications, often practically based such as NVQs.
4. The type of engagement in training or CPD depends on if a quick fix solution is needed, or longer term training and knowledge and skills. For larger employers in the private sector, innovation in supporting the development of new products and services and technology is a key priority area. If universities could identify employers who are working in product innovation and could offer research facilities and support, this could be the first step in building a longer and broader relationship, including training.
5. To engage employers need to have a campaign, which needs to start with lots of 'white noise', e.g. Press articles, adverts, sponsorship, etc, which provides background profile. Radio is also a powerful medium, but the key point is that any messages must be meaningful to the intended audience. Telemarketing can also be a powerful tool, but to be effective it needs to be done by professionals.
6. The key to successful engagement is to make employers see the value in what is being offered, and Case Studies are often a good way of getting the message across. Also associating with a known brand – Skills South East use the Train to Gain brand as this helps raise their profile. Key to engagement for them and for the brokers is that they are impartial – i.e. not selling a product, but rather offering services which could save employers time and money.
7. An example of where this worked well was with CooperVision – company that makes lenses and glasses. The Broker went in and looked at the business goals and training plans the company had put together. They were planning on spending in the region of £400,000 on training and staff development. The broker showed where tweaking the plan could save money through using a qualifications route and gaining funding. The company saved £200,000.

8. A qualification that is well received is the Business Improvement Techniques which is key in the current economic climate and can produce real cost savings. The NVQ which includes elements of:
  - Team working
  - Organising work station and work flow
  - Benchmarking outputs and building improvement.
  
9. The Chart on the next page illustrates the needs analysis exercise that is undertaken with larger companies. The approach is very much a brain storming one, and sheets are available to help organisations define what might constitute effective managers so that performance and effectiveness can be monitored against SMART targets. It should be noted that the Training Plan and Evaluation are critical and can be fragile, in that when progress is being made attention may turn away from the need to evaluate and to feed back into the training plan. The most critical features are that the plan and analysis should be seen as:
  - Relevant to organisation and the outcomes it aspires to;
  - Meaningful in helping outcomes achievement
  - Adding value
  
10. For HEIs to engage with employers, especially the larger ones, they need to target information at the sector in which specific employers are operating in, and not provide generalised information, as this has been shown to be ineffective. Thought needs to be given to the challenges the employers are facing, how HEIs may be able to help with formulating or supporting solutions. The use of Case Studies to show past success is very meaningful to employers, particularly those operating in competitive markets. In addition, make sure that any information as to how funding may be available is transparent.

**Needs Analysis Approach used by Skills South East for Train to Gain.**

ORGANISATION CULTURE



## **Notes of meeting with college senior manager responsible for Business Development, held on 7th November 2008**

1. The College has put in place a team of 6 Sales Executives to initiate contact with employers, and follow up on enquiries received. The Sales Executives were previously organised on a sector basis, but this has recently been changed to a geographic basis to serve identified hot spots. This new strategy has also reduced the travel costs. Sales Executives are now home-based with a work area in which they can meet in the central office at least once per week. This facilitates communication around engagement strategies and emerging training needs with sectors and individual employers.
2. Sales Executives are expected to generate their own leads through utilising a data-base the College has purchased from 'Experium'. The data-base is updated at least every 3 months to provide accurate information. Contacts are made with employers in a number of ways:
  - e-mail utilising a 'glossy' marketing brochure – but this has been found to have value with only around 15% of employers as tracked by the software;
  - Telesales company – originally J2Profit with very poor range of responses – now using a Medway based company with local knowledge;
  - Following up leads from Skills South East;
  - Mosiac Lifestyles to target certain areas with suitable programmes. This is the case, for example, with the voluntary sector that is now eligible for Train to Gain funding
3. The College is working to improve the relationship with Skills South East through hosting an event for Skills Brokers to better inform them about the WKC product portfolio and capabilities. The College also wants to improve communications with Skills South East and build a better understanding of the aims and objects and systems used by the Skills South East brokerage.
4. The College Train to Gain contract for 2008-09 is 2,300 learners. Only a small percentage of this is at Level 3 currently – 85% is at Level 2. There is some progression between Level 2 and Level 3, mostly through the Advanced Apprenticeships, in such areas as Dental Nursing and Construction. Teaching Assistants Apprenticeships are being developed further.
5. The key to success is looking at what the employers want and asking them where they hope to be in 12 months time. When talking to small businesses this may need to be approached differently, rather than where do they want to be in planning terms in 12 months time, the focus may need to be on what steps need to be taken to ensure the small business is still trading and growing over the next year. The key element is often linked to customer services and what is needed to ensure the business remains operational. The Training Quality Standard is used to measure the impact of training.
6. When talking to employers, it is important to talk in terms that are appropriate to them, for example, in Care NVQs are widely understood, whilst in other sectors the focus is more on discussion of 'skills' needs. Provision needs to be 'tailored' to the employer or sector needs. Sales Executives do not always go into employer meetings to 'sell' a qualification, rather the focus is on a 'solution' to meet skills and training needs, provision in many cases leading to a qualification. Depending on who is being approached within the employers' organisation – a different view of

overall training requirements may be gained. When brokers talk to employers they utilise a two part form which can record:

- Training Needs Analysis – for individual employees;
- Organisation Needs Analysis – for the overall business requirements.

7. Case studies can offer a clarity as to the value of training outcomes, and help to win hearts and minds. Sales Executives undertake some background research on the employer organisation prior to any meeting so that examples and discussions can be around relevant growth and skills needs.
8. In the case of larger employers, the College can do a skills audit, as for example, was the case for a secondary school. The College utilised one of the school's training days to work with their administrative staff to undertake a skills audit, including Basic Skills needs, and identify appropriate training provision, which was subsequently delivered. Some organisations such as Kent Police, have undertaken their own skills audit, and drawn up a list of training they want delivered.
9. Most training is delivered on the employers' premises. Where a number of individuals are identified as having a common training need, this may be delivered using local facilities, e.g. Adult Education Centres close to the employer base. This happens particularly in the case of Basic Skills provision. Team Leader training often also requires some group input.
10. The Train to Gain contract the College holds involves working with other partner organisations. When first granted this involved the College having an 80/20 split with partners, this is now a 60/40 split. When looking at the scheduling of training, the College can work with partners to try and meet employer preferences. This partnership working offers greater flexibility of timings.
11. The College makes a clear distinction between the sales and delivery roles – have a team who try and schedule provision against capacity and monitor delivery.
12. The College undertakes satisfaction surveys from both learners and employers. For learners this is done through a form which learners are asked to complete before the end of their programme. For employers who have no publically funded provision, survey satisfaction forms are sent out with the invoice. There is also an e-survey used for employers with funded training. This facility can be accessed by Sales Executives remotely to gauge progress and how well employers are perceiving provision. The College analyses the results on a quarterly basis, and this complements the bonus system that Sales Executives receive.
13. Successful strategies for employer engagement need to include:
  - a) Good account management with a single point of contact so that a relationship can be built. One measure of success is through repeat business, which is seen as key. The account manager needs to have a good understanding of what the employer wants and is able to get involved in understanding the business;
  - b) Marketing – using tactics that are complementing to their business, e.g. whether e-marketing is appropriate and read by the employer and responded to, or whether other methods are preferred.
  - c) Need to be clear about market segmentation – i.e., whether areas are divided by sector, geographic location or other criteria.

- d) Don't talk qualifications when looking at employer training needs, focus on skills and improvements linked to this for the business. Provision can be customised or bespoke if required and the employer, and they can afford to pay.

14. Regular contact needs to be kept with employers – account managers will talk to them once every two months to monitor satisfaction and emerging training needs.

#### **Notes of Meeting with Sales Executive Team at the same College held on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2009.**

1. Sales Executives operate with geographic areas, other than for Construction. When Sales Executives attend meeting with employers they already have some idea of the training that is being requested. However, they will undertake an Organisation Needs Analysis, as appropriate, to identify the full potential range of training needs.
2. The approach taken when meeting with employers is more conversational than going through a list of questions, making the process feel more personal. They will talk about the business in general, and aim to build a relationship that will be sustainable. However, if they are initially going in to discuss a particular training need, for example, NVQs in Care, they may also explore whether there are additional needs for other staff in the kitchen, cleaning staff, etc.
3. Business are made aware of the College as a training provider through a range of methods including:
  - Mail-shots (contextualised to separate types of business & customised)
  - Advertising in some trade journals
  - Use of Case Studies in 'West Life' College news – now sent to employers
  - General advertising of training provision linked to statutory requirements
  - Networking events including those with the Chambers of Commerce
  - Business Link
  - Building links with the Federation of Small Businesses.
4. Sales Executives utilise an Accounts Management model, providing employers with a single point of contact and to maintain ongoing relationships. This also involves making employers aware of new funding for training, for example the Level 3 funding now available. It is at the discretion of the Account Managers as to the frequency of contact maintained with individual employers. Individual Sales Executives are in charge of managing different funding streams, e.g. Apprenticeships, T2G, etc.
5. There is a focus on Labour Market Intelligence and this is used to calculate and monitor market penetration. The college has around 2,500 Train to Gain starts in the current year, with an average of around two learners per employer. Progress and engagements are monitored, but the CRM system is not as good as it could be. The College is taking forward its' application for QTS and is working to monitor their impact on local training needs using the Framework.
6. What employers respond positively to:
  - Personal contact – mostly face-to-face in the case of new business;

- Single point of contact for questions, monitoring, etc, through the training period;
  - Rapid response to enquiries;
  - Listening carefully to what the employer wants, and referring the work to other providers where this would be the best way of meeting their immediate training needs;
  - Responsiveness – 2/3 weeks from contact to putting training in place. However, where there is high demand, this make take longer – up to 6/8 weeks.
7. Assessor capacity may be a delaying or limiting factor in putting training in place quickly. Where this is the case, partners in the T2G consortium will be approached. It is important to manage employer’s expectations, and not raise false expectations.
8. Most employers want training delivered on their own premises. Some employers recognise the value of HE and higher levels training. There may, however, be a distinction between what the employer wants (modules that provide skills quickly) and what the learner may want (qualifications).
9. Factors that could improve current systems and provision were identified as:
- More resources, mainly people to deliver training and undertake administrative tasks;
  - More assessors – this is being addressed through the Assessor Academy;
  - How capacity is managed – new systems are being built;
  - A really good CRM system – fully integrated and used by everyone, and linked to the QL system;
  - Targeted recruitment drive aimed at those with experience of working in private sector organisations to join training teams and work with colleges. Secondments would also provide valuable insights and help take forward developments;
  - More holistic funding to meet training needs – not just NVQs and Apprenticeships;
  - More employer engagement with apprenticeships – perhaps through some financial incentives for employers.
10. Barriers to employer engagement were seen as including:
- Money – costs of training and potential loss of production or employee time;
  - Fear of loosing staff once they are trained to competitors;
  - Number of SMES are very small and have a lack of capacity to engage with training;
  - Too many organisations/agencies approaching employers to talk about training – there is a feeling of saturation and employers have limited time for engagement given the priorities of running businesses;
  - Sales Houses – these organisations charge providers for making appointments with employers. They duplicate the work of Business Link and Skills Brokers, and can add to the saturation effect mentioned above.
  - Brokers who work for T2G and heavily promote this aspect – may be other routes that might be more suitable;
  - Need to break down the stereo-type of FE only being able to provide college based training – and promote college as providers of Work Based Learning and Training.

11. There is some identified training need at Level 4. Progression for learners is one aspect leading to demand. However, there is not always an appropriate qualification in place and development costs for such provision is high. It should be noted, that where there is no regulatory requirement, levels of interest are lower. The College has 7 Level 4 learners currently on management programmes. All publicity materials include reference to Level 4 and above.

### **Notes of meeting with Business Development Manager from a second College held on 26th November 2008**

1. The Business Development team makes all the contact calls and visits to employers often following up on leads provided by Skills South East brokers. Partnership Managers undertake Training Needs Analysis using a template. The aim is then to match the employer training needs to the college existing course offer. The College offers employer training mainly at level 2, however level 3 is also available and some level 4 through Foundation Degrees.
2. With the new funding from the LSC and T2G employers can be approached about level 4 training. However, with the small numbers of people in the sales team this is likely to take time, and the offer will need to fit with other college targets.
3. The flexibilities around funding are seen as positive, however the College is part of a consortium so must look for the best match in terms of training provision with partners. Current consortium involves 5 partners who currently undertaken 80% of the employer based training with the College undertaking around 20%.
4. Timing is an important factor, as employers do not want to wait long for provision, so an import factor within the consortium is to look at capacity and where demand can best and most promptly be met. TQS is being looked at in 2009.
5. Where no provision is available, the college will try and direct employers to other quality training providers who may be able to meet their needs, however, even brokers find this difficult on occasion. One of the problems in dealing with brokers is that they can focus on their own targets, and sometimes not fully conversant with the full offer of individual providers. This had been supported by the experiences of the college in talking to brokers.
6. The College seeks to work with stakeholder groups, for example in Early Years, Engineering, etc, and attends breakfast and evening meeting to try and update employers and also to involve them in future curriculum development, so supporting a demand led approach. The College also has a representative who sits on a local employers group. They are considering holding a joint event with consortium partners to showcase for employers the range of training provision on offer.
7. The College is looking at how occupational and vocational learners can be helped to progress to Foundation Degrees and other higher levels training. They may consider bringing in representatives from local HEIs to help explain to learners and employers the benefits of higher level study. The College has moved away from a high proportion of training in Care and is seeking to build more diversity through such areas as engineering and construction, warehouse inspection, transport and fork-lift truck operation. As yet little work has been undertaken in the voluntary sector.

8. Employers gain information about T2G offer through:
  - Newspaper articles
  - Events
  - Partnership Managers contacting them (operate on a geographical basis)
  - Development of on-line information for employers
  - Development of Business Guides for employers
  - Mail-shots
  - Attendance of regional and local employer focused events.
9. Current T2G provision at the college is 95% at Level 2. They are hoping to grow Level 3 in the current academic year as this provision can also be fully funded. The diversification into new sectors should help grow level 3 also.
10. Most employers are seeking accredited qualifications. Some require short courses and these are identified through the business development team and run as cost recovery.
11. Capacity is a key factor in how quickly provision can be put in place. Working with partners provision is normally delivered within a maximum of 2 months from need being identified. This largely reflects the level of responsiveness employers are seeking. However, where the employer is seeking an accredited long qualification, waiting times can be substantial as these may only commence in September, e.g. Apprenticeships. For qualifications such as NVQs, these are run as roll-on roll-off provision.
12. Most training is undertaken on the employers' premises using dedicated trainers and assessors. In areas where demand is small, some academic staff may be utilised where available. Some provision is run in the evenings, for example in Care and Early Years and may be in addition to the 15 hours through T2G.
13. Follow up contact after deliver of training is undertaken to ascertain whether there are any other training needs. The College has an IT based system that logs contacts and follow-ups, as well as other identified needs. This is done on a regular basis as part of the customer service element.
14. Evaluation of provision is undertaken with both learners and employer. For learners questionnaires are sent out 3 times per year by curriculum area. Employers are surveyed when the training provision is near completion (though this aspect is under review). This is undertaken by Partnership Managers and also the T2G manager – mostly through face-to-face meetings.
15. The college seek effective employer engagement as being defined by:
  - Responsiveness – quick follow-up to enquiries
  - Good communications –once again linked to follow-up contacts
  - Quality – often evidenced and monitored through repeat business
  - Providing what the employer wants – being flexible.

## Notes of meeting with senior manager for a Private Training Provider held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2008

1. Have a five stage process for engaging with employers which they put in place in response to enquiries from employers with regard to training needs and wants. There needs to be a clear distinction between 'needs' and 'wants' – these are not always the same thing. A key part of successful engagement on the part of the training provider is to help differentiate between what the employer may think is wanted to improve performance or fill skills gaps, and what is actually needed to deliver this.
2. Staff aim to respond to any enquiry within 2 working days of receipt of the enquiry. All enquiries are logged and tracked. The aim is to arrange a meeting with the client within 10 working days, though this is at the discretion of the client. Good practice is always to return the client's call, not ask them to call back. The rule is 'keep trying via telephone and email until you get a response'. It can often take several or more attempts before contact is established in response to an enquiry.
3. The 5 stage process involves talking to those who may be involved in the work process, as well as with senior management.
  - **Analysis** – helps identify the client's needs and capabilities and the skills gaps to be met. This can also involve looking at the structure of the organisation and as well as analysis of the productivity, number of tasks, etc.
  - **Design** – Need to build on listening carefully to what the employer and employees have to say and then design a package that will meet the outcomes of the needs analysis exercise. (This process is not about selling products that exist, but identifying what accredited courses or modules that may attract funding could be suitable, and where these may need to be customised or indeed where employers' own training can be incorporated or bespoke provision added. This will factor into the overall costs).
  - **Implementation** – Involves the delivery of the training, most frequently on the employers' premises. Where accredited units are used, sometimes need to customise or tailor examples and any assessment to the company/sector needs. May also involve use of consultancy services to meet the organisation structure or management training needs.
  - **Evaluation** – looks at the suitability and satisfaction with the training and consultancy provision – sufficiency as improvement of productivity and services.
  - **Sustainability** – ensuring the systems are in place to sustain the benefits to the organisation and individuals in the longer term.
4. Advice is offered on funding, which may need to be a combination of LSC/public funding and commercially funded provision. They utilise Skills South East brokers both to identify new business, and to seek advice on funding of training.
5. The key message in terms of employer satisfaction and successful engagement is 'Give the employer what they want, not just what may be fundable'. This is particularly the case with middle to large employers, with whom they do a substantial part of their work.

6. IPS use mail-shots, Skills South East, internet and other marketing resources to bring their organisation and products to the attention of employers.
7. Good practice also involves exploring broader or other training needs that may exist within the organisation, over and above the initial area of enquiry. An example of this was contact with Gravesham Council who wanted training for Administrative and Customer Services Staff involving apprenticeships. Alongside this a need for IT training was identified, and this was funded through Train to Gain. Where the training provider is not able to offer the training required, good practice dictates that they offer recommendations as to other organisations who may be able to do so, and whose provision has been viewed as good.
8. The provider has worked to establish good relationships with other agencies, for example, Apprentice-on-line and Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO). This provides an external marketing source to identify new leads. Skills South East likewise provides a number of client leads. These organisations are made fully aware of what the provider is able to offer.
9. Any successful training provider requires an organisation structure that supports good communications. The organisation aims must be clear, namely, what factors will influence employers, and follow through by getting the right people in front of the employers. For example, sector experts may be needed or management and leadership consultants who can undertake broader skills need analysis, or a combination of both. Putting training provider representatives in front of employers is only half the story, they need to be supported by mechanisms to explore and negotiate how provision will be put in place. Where training materials need to be written, access to staff who can undertake this work quickly is critical.
10. The provider offers Apprenticeships in Industrial Engineering – a 44 week full-time programme. This provides the full framework – BTEC Certificate, NVQ 2 and Key Skills. This is the only programme run that has a fixed start date in September, all others are roll-on, roll-off models, or put in place by negotiation with the employer.
11. Timing of training provision can be important, but is normally negotiated based on the availability of trainers. Will try as far as possible to meet the preferences of the client.
12. Satisfaction surveys for employers have only just been put in place using QDP Services, who offer this service to a range of Training Providers. The information provides automatic benchmarks against a range of criteria, and can help the organisation identify where improvements may be needed.
13. Learner satisfaction surveys are undertaken in two ways:
  - Annual survey using standard classifications ranging from ‘very good’ to ‘poor’;
  - Short surveys with groups of learners during the course of a year, this is mainly with the Apprentices. These short surveys can help structure thoughts around quality of the learning experience, and each survey uses different sets of questions.
14. All surveys are confidential, though employers and learners are given the overall results. The Learner Satisfaction Survey is sent out to all Apprentices and those undertaking training through

Train to Gain. Currently have around a 40% response rate, with over 92% of respondents indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied. Such surveys provide mainly quantitative information, whilst employer surveys provide more qualitative information. It is this latter type that is seen as having most value in terms of informing improvements to provision and services to employers.

15. In addition Apprentices are split into four groups, each one electing two representatives who meet with the Training Provider to discuss aspects of the training or raise any matters they feel are relevant.
16. The provider is currently working towards the Training Quality Standard. However, they have seen a 25% expansion in business in each of the last two years which carries a very positive message in a competitive market place. Return custom is also monitored and presented as part of the monthly management accounts.

### **Notes of meeting with second Private Training Provider held on 10th November 2008**

1. Currently have 187 learners on their books, and hope to have 250 learners for the financial year 2008/09. The qualifications offered include Children's Learning and Development at levels 2-4 and NVQs. Also offer programmes for Teaching Assistants including the CACHE Level 2 & 3 and full framework Apprenticeships for those aged 16years and above (6 currently enrolled). They also provides training for assessors (A1). The 'Getting Started in Pre-School Settings' training is also offered at Level 1 for the Shore Trust. Key and Basic Skills are embedded in the programmes, but may also be offered as stand alone provision where applicable.
2. Employers currently number 109 – mostly schools and early years settings. Information on training available is circulated through use of Skills Brokers, Mail-shots, Community Forums and word of mouth.
3. Offer clear progression routes and learners are all advised as to their options. Many choose to remain with provider and look for progression within the offer. Work is undertaken with Schools and Local Authorities, often where the employers have been let down or less than satisfied with provision from other providers. Provider has a good profile and have participated in a national exhibit at Olympia.
4. All information provided to both employers and learners complies with Equality and Diversity legislation, and where possible, Train to Gain routes are promoted.
5. Engagement with employers to ascertain their training requirements is always undertaken face-to-face as this has been found to be very effective. It is seen as essential to be clear with employers as to what they can expect, and to maintain ongoing relationships by monitoring satisfaction and also informing as to updates and new training opportunities.
6. Training is undertaken through outreach, with clearly set out employer agreements, hand-books, etc. Provider has a profile/target for the number of starts they aim to put in place for each month, and all programmes operate on a 'roll-on, roll-off' basis. Employers do not want to wait for annual start dates as in many conventional education courses. Best practice is to ensure employers get what

they want and need to meet their requirements, and training can and is delivered on Saturdays, evenings, and other times, on the employers' premises.

7. It is crucial to provide feedback on learner progress to the employer, including the outcome of assessments, such that the employer knows where the learner is on the training programme. Three monthly reviews are undertaken to:
  - Keep the learner on track;
  - Keep employers in the loop – ensure their voice is heard.
8. This ongoing communications approach meets the needs of the education sector, with all reviews having set documentation completed and copied to the learner, employer and funding agency. A graduation ceremony is held annually for all those who have completed a programme, to which the employers are also invited.
9. Deliver on many programmes whilst by distance and work based learning, now has a minimum of 3 mandatory workshops to ensure that underpinning knowledge is put in place. The Train to Gain requirement is for 15 hours of underpinning knowledge either in group settings or as one-to-one sessions.
10. Providers have to take into consideration individual learner needs. Provider ensures all learners complete an initial assessment, including a skills can to assess literacy and numeracy, so that provision can be planned and end dates set. This process links directly to funding and cash flow, as well as allocation of trainers. When a training need has been identified, this is put into the monthly allocation which links to resource availability and deployment. The normal lead time for commencement of training is 3 or 4 weeks, and active planning takes into account expected completions in the following two months. All assessors are able to assess on all the programmes offered, and only one assessor is put in place per setting. This allows for flexibility and a personalised approach to both the learner and the employer. The current systems have taken 3 years to refine and have been reviewed as good quality by OFSTED and linked to criteria in the QIA.
11. A good deal of the training delivered is driven by regulations, for example the need for a minimum of Level 2 qualifications to work with children and young people. The expansion of Train to Gain funding to include the voluntary sector has allowed those working with pre-school groups to be included, and indeed appeals to many volunteers who may have no formal qualifications at all. Currently around half the learners are undertaking Level 2 qualifications and around half Level 3. Very few are taking Level 4. Most learners in this sector need government funding to support their training to make it accessible.
12. Evaluations and surveys are undertaken consistently. Learners complete evaluation forms on paper or electronically via the website, after:
  - Induction
  - Midcourse reviews
  - End of programme
13. Provider now logs the number of evaluation forms sent out so as to be able to track the percentage of returns, as this is essential to quality monitoring. A monthly review of feedback can then be

compiled; both positive and negative, and necessary work can then be built into the central action plan which is monitored by the centre manager. Managing the information coming in can be difficult unless the process is well structured – this is done by the Centre Manager, Quality Manager and Programme Leader who talks to the assessors.

14. The key criteria for successful employer engagement would include:
  - Communication – listening to the employer and what they want
  - Flexibility – meet the needs as mot appropriate to the work setting
  - Quality but at the right price
  
15. As Quality is essential, and provider has an annual Quality Journey format – each month has a certain focus which helps to track various aspects of quality through the office information received. The Quality Journey also has a number of set tasks and allocated staff responsible for monitoring and actioning them. Reports are then produced quarterly as part of the Quality Journal/Matrix.
  
16. The completion rate for learners was 85% in 2007-08 and 92% in 2006-07.

## Appendix 7

### Learner questionnaire

#### QUESTIONS FOR LEARNER SURVEY

(Please tick one box per question)

1. Please indicate your current or most recent programme of training
  - Level 2 NVQ or Certificate
  - Level 3 NVQ or Certificate/Diploma
  - Level 4 or above qualifications e.g. HNC/D,  
Foundation Degree, Management
  - Other – please give title:
2. Please indicate the subject or content of your most recent training:
  - Engineering
  - Administration
  - Business Management
  - Book Keeping and Accounting
  - Construction
  - Customer Services
  - Health and Social Care
  - IT
  - Land-based or agriculture
  - Leisure and Tourism
  - Retail
  - Team Leading
3. Did your employer fund for your training/qualification? Yes  No
4. Has the training you received helped you at work? Yes  No
5. Would your employer encourage you in undertaking further training? Yes  No
6. Would your employer allow you time-off for further training? Yes  No
7. Are you aware of Foundation Degrees\*? Yes  No
8. Would you be interested in taking a qualification at a higher level that may help you to develop your career? Yes  No  Don't Know
9. Would you require financial support from your employer and/or Government funding if undertaking further qualifications or training? Yes  No

10. If you have any ideas as to training or qualifications you would be interested in taking in the future, please note these in the box below.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return to:

