LAUNCH OF INTEGRATED BROKERAGE SERVICE - 1 APRIL 2009

Key Messages

- From 1 April both Train to Gain and Business Link brokers will come together in a new service under the Business Link brand. The new service will provide a “one stop shop” for business, offering a fully integrated information, diagnostic and brokerage service.

- The change has been made following Train to Gain’s integration with the Solutions for Business portfolio, the Government’s streamlined package of business support products accessible via Business Link brokerage. Business Link will be the primary access channel to all government support for business.

- The vision for the new, integrated service is one where all brokers are able to promote skills as part of a wider conversation about business needs whilst engaging more employers in developing a more highly skilled and qualified workforce. Brokers will offer tried and tested skills diagnostics so companies can have their training needs accurately identified; and will point business to the right solutions from the most appropriate providers.

- The challenging times ahead make it more important than ever that businesses increase, not reduce their investment in skills. Firms that don’t invest are 2.5 times more likely to fail. The new service is about proactively raising employers’ understanding of the importance of skills to business improvement and growth. And it’s about offering “real help for businesses now”; making it easier for employers to access the best advice for their business, when they need it and with the minimum of fuss.

How can businesses access this support?

- Accessing support couldn’t be easier. Simply call Business Link on 0845 600 9006. Callers will be referred to a local broker who can give individual advice about what training could help that business increase productivity. The broker can help diagnose the businesses training needs, explain where courses are on offer, and link up with suitable providers in the area – they know what local colleges offer the courses that can meet employers’ needs. The broker can also explain how to access funding.

- Information on the help available on skills issues is also available via the website: www.businesslink.gov.uk

- Alternatively, employers may choose to go direct to a private provider; perhaps they already use them for some training

Facts about Brokerage

- There are currently around 450 Train to Gain (TtG) brokers. From 1 April 2009 we are bringing together TtG and Business Link brokers, meaning around 1200 additional brokers will be promoting skills as part of wider conversations with businesses.
• 77% of employers who use the current TtG brokers are satisfied or very satisfied with the service they receive. They report high levels of satisfaction with:
  - The impartiality of advice offered
  - Expertise in giving guidance and knowledge of local provision
  - Accessibility of the broker

• Take up of Train to Gain training amongst small employers has increased as a result of contact with Skills Brokers. 20% of employers with fewer than five employees have accessed training through Train to Gain.

Satisfaction with the Business Link service

• Customer satisfaction with the Business Link service is also high, with 90% of all customers reporting that they were satisfied with the service.

• The likelihood of re-using and the likelihood of recommending Business Link to others are measured on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being very unlikely and 10 being very likely). Over half of customers reported that they would be very likely to re-use Business Link, with 59% giving 10. 83% of respondents scored an 8 or above. On likelihood to recommend Business Link to others, 62% gave 10 and 85% of respondents scored 8 or above.

• Early indications are that the 'net recommend' score for Business Link would put it in the top 20 brands in the UK.

Background

Solutions for Business

1. Businesses complained that multiple publicly-funded products, brands and providers were confusing and off-putting. In response, the Government has streamlined the number of products available from an estimated 3,000 to an opening 30, and has made Business Link the main access route to this support. This will make it easier for companies to access the help they need.

2. Solutions for Business is a package of government products covering a range of advice, loans and grants provided collectively and consistently to businesses by all levels of government – nationally, regionally and locally via Business Link. Train to Gain is the Government’s employer facing skills product, which is part of the Solutions for Business portfolio.

Integrated Brokerage Service

3. Following the recommendation in the Sub-National Review, the 2007 Pre-budget Report announced Government’s intention to launch of a single, integrated business support brokerage service in April 2009, to include Train to Gain skills brokerage as a major component, and branded as Business Link.

4. The core elements of the skills aspect of the integrated brokerage service will be:
   • Quality-assured advice in identifying skills needs, at all levels, from skills brokers with expertise in their area of business;
   • Help to identify and source high quality training and qualifications to meet those skills needs;
• An expert that will pull together a skills solution package which may include government training subsidies, alongside the employer’s own contributions;
• For those making the Skills Pledge, follow up advice and support that is fully integrated within the Train to Gain Service.

Q&A

1. Why are you launching the new service?

To make it easier for businesses by bringing together the current Train to Gain brokerage service with Business Link to provide a fully integrated information, diagnostic and brokerage service. Business Link will be the primary access channel to all government support for business including skills. Business Link brokers will be able to help employers relate the skills needs of their company to their training plans and business strategies.

2. Isn’t this just superficial tinkering?

No. To gain most from training interventions, companies need to ensure that the training proposal directly relates to and supports the company’s explicit business strategy and objectives, yet companies are too rarely offered the opportunity to synchronise their business strategy with public training programmes. By integrating Business brokerage with skills brokerage we can ensure a complete service.

3. Isn’t such change the last thing employers need in the current economic situation?

Absolutely not. The current economic downturn has lent this work a special urgency. It has never been more important to ensure that employers get access to the support they need – quickly and easily. The new service will help make sure that happens.

4. Are brokers up to the job?

Yes – we know that some parts of the service are better than others, but employers who use the service like it. 77% of employers who have used TtG brokerage service tell us that they’re satisfied or highly satisfied and 90% of all customers reported that they were satisfied with the Business Link service. We are not complacent and will aim to ensure that the new integrated service maintains, if not exceeds, these impressive standards.

5. Is the broker support free?

Employers can get advice from a broker at no cost to their business. Training staff properly requires a financial and time investment from employers, but the broker will identify any funding and subsidies employers are eligible for.

6. How will the broker help a business?

The broker will help employers to:
• identify the skills that will boost the business
• create a tailored package of training and support
• find reliable local colleges and training providers
• find funding to complement the employers’ investment
• evaluate the training and support the employer receives to ensure real results

7. Won’t the integrated service just lead to more brokers from different agencies all knocking on employers’ doors?

• Essential that we get this right or we risk wasting resources and, more importantly, alienating employers. We are developing a set of national protocols which will set out agreed handover procedures between the relevant agencies. There is already some good practice happening in the regions on which we must build.
• We are looking to the various agencies and services to come together regularly at regional level to plan their employer engagement strategies to remove duplication of approaches wherever possible.

8. 70% of all Train to Gain referrals come direct from training providers so why do we need a brokerage service?

• Recognise the important role that brokers play in the success of Train to Gain. Where an employer/provider relationship already exists we are happy for the employer to continue to deal direct with the provider.
• However, a key objective for the service is to engage with employers who don’t train and who may not know where to go for advice and support. This is where the brokers come in and the brokerage service has proved to be very successful in reaching these employers.

9. What is the relationship between ‘Solutions for Business’ and Business Link?

• Solutions for Business works hand-in-hand with Business Link, the former as the government’s offer of business support, the latter as the generic route to access this support, and other types of impartial advice, diagnosis and brokerage to support.