Leading learning and skills

Winter 08/09

The Magazine of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for partners and people interested in learning and skills issues in the East of England
Welcome to the winter edition of the Magazine

The LSC Statement of Priorities has been released and sets out the way we intend to focus our efforts and resources for the coming year. This time the LSC has joined together with Govt. departments DIUS and DCSF to produce a document that pulls together all spending priorities.

The LSC Statement of Priorities for 2009/10

At the Association of Colleges annual conference in November, John Denham, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills; Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and Chris Banks, LSC Chairman launched the Statement of Priorities for 2009/10.

This year finds the document in a different format as the LSC has joined together with DIUS and DCSF to produce a document that pulls together all of the information on spending priorities that the LSC and the sector need. It sets out the ways we intend to focus our efforts and resources for the coming year.

The targets aim to raise the educational achievement of all children and young people and narrow the gap in achievement between children from low income families and their peers. For adults, the aim is to improve the skills of the population and deliver a world-class skills base by 2020. The focus remains with Train to Gain, Apprenticeships and to work more coherently on the integration of employment and skills.

The Statement of Priorities can be found on the LSC website http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-statementofpriorities200910-nov08.pdf

Five million employees benefit from commitment to training

Chris Banks, LSC Chairman, visited Cambridge Regional College in December and met with members of the East of England Regional Council. He thanked members for their continuing commitment to the LSC and for choosing to make a difference to the learning and skills agenda.

At the meeting, Chris told the council that the LSC’s main priorities are in maintaining and improving performance, preparing for transition and responding to the economic downturn. The three most important areas going forward are Young People - improving participation and apprenticeships; Adults - improving numbers of Apprenticeships and Train to Gain starts; and Integrated Employment and Skills.

Council members were also encouraged to support the executive during this time of change.

The Skills Pledge is a partnership between organisations, DIUS and the LSC. It was developed to boost the importance of training in the workplace, which, as senior business leaders recently affirmed, is even more vital during an economic downturn.

To celebrate the latest Skills Pledge milestone, the chief executive of DHL Express Ken McCall invited Lord Young to meet James Ford at their Wapping depot in London.

Organisations can find out more about making the Skills Pledge at www.lsc.gov.uk/skillspledge or by calling 0800 015 55 45.
East of England training providers receive new standard for training excellence

Training provider Bedford College, Goldsmith Centre for Business, based in Letchworth Garden City, Norfolk’s City College Norwich, Q Training and National Construction College, along with West Suffolk College based in Bury St Edmunds have achieved a Training Quality Standard (TQS) in recognition of delivering high quality training to employers in their county.

The Standard highlights the training provider’s excellent track record in responding to employer needs and their ability to offer high quality at a time and place to suit employers. The providers have also been commended for making it easy for employers to find the right training solutions for their business.

The Training Quality Standard was officially launched by Skills minister David Lammy on 8 May last year and has been developed to give employers a benchmark for choosing training provision and sets providers apart from the competition.

Employers have been involved every step of the way in the creation of the assessment and accreditation system for the Training Quality Standard. During the assessment process training providers are assessed against the two key criteria; employer responsiveness to employer needs and provider excellence in a particular vocational area.

South East Regional Assessment Centre Ltd has achieved part A and is now progressing to Part B of the Standard. Providers currently in the application process include: Cambridge Training & Consultancy Ltd, Great Yarmouth College, Poole Tec Training and Suffolk New College.

Training providers who have applied to receive this accreditation so far include colleges, universities, commercial and publicly funded training organisations and large employers. There are currently 60 training providers in the UK who have reached the new standard and a further 200 who are currently being assessed.

To find out more about TQS, logo onto http://www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk

“"We are delighted that the feedback from businesses we work with has helped us to gain this prestigious accreditation - which other employers will be able to recognise as a sign of the benefits we can bring through quality training made available at the right time and the right place.” Sharon Chinneck, Director of Enterprise, Bedford College

“The tough quality mark process was an extremely valuable tool which helped our already successful business achieve greater consistency across all areas and a higher level of awareness in everything we now do with employers.”

Tony Joyce, Vice Principal of Enterprise and Employer Engagement, Goldsmith Centre, (affiliated to North Hertfordshire College)

“It is fantastic news that City College Norwich is one of the very first colleges to be recognised for the high quality of their training offer to employers. The award of the Training Quality Standard is recognition of the focus we have on the needs of employers in our region and our commitment to meeting their skills needs.”

Dick Palmer, Principal of City College Norwich

“In the spring of last year we found that we could apply for the Training Quality Standard under the small company pilot scheme and decided to go for it. The journey has been very testing, the Standard was very demanding but we are so pleased that Q Training has achieved so much so quickly.”

Joyce Newham, Q Training Quality Assurance Director

“We are delighted to have been awarded the standard but it would not have been possible to achieve it if we didn’t have the outstanding commitment, ‘can do attitude’ and employer focussed culture that all our staff at the National Construction College demonstrate on a daily basis.”

Jan Coates, Standards Manager of the National Construction College

“We are delighted that West Suffolk College has gained the TQS standard in seven areas, all of which are priority sectors for the locality and the wider region. Employer Engagement is central to the College’s strategy and offer. The TQS provided us with an additional focus and we have used it to ensure that we have a consistent approach across all our employer provision. TQS is the most challenging benchmark that we have worked towards.”

Martyn Wagner, Vice Principal, Business and Student Service

“No other organisation has achieved seven accreditations. This is a fantastic achievement for the College. I would like to thank all those staff involved in this for undertaking what was a challenging additional task last year, and congratulate Vice Principal, Martyn Wagner and Head of Business Development, Elizabeth Bray for their leadership.”

Dr Ann Williams, Principal, West Suffolk College

More employers in the region make the Skills Pledge

A number of events around the region have seen employers sign the Skills Pledge and realise the importance of employee training and improving skills during this difficult economic climate. Here are just some of the employers across the region who have recently signed the Skills Pledge:

Lakeside Shopping Centre showed its commitment to improving the skills of its workforce by signing the Skills Pledge at a ceremony in October.

The ceremony, which took place at the Lakeside Training Centre, was attended by key personnel from Lakeside, Thurrock Council, Skillsmart (Sector Skills Council for Retail) and the Learning and Skills Council Essex. This included Steve Chandler, General Manager for Lakeside; Janice Logie, Area Director for the Learning and Skills Council; and Suzanne MacPherson, Deputy Leader of Thurrock Council.

After the signing of the Skills Pledge, Steve Chandler was passed the Skills Pledge relay baton by Victoria Dixon, Acting Manager for Learning and Development, FedEx, who made the pledge in the summer.

Steve Chandler, General Manager for Lakeside, comments: “At Lakeside, we’re committed to giving our employees and retailers ongoing support for training, which is why we’ve signed the Government’s Skills Pledge. In partnership with our retailers and Thurrock and Basildon College we are passionate about ensuring careers in retail achieve the recognition they deserve via investment in high quality training and development for all our 3,000 employees.”

Janice Logie, Area Director for the Learning and Skills Council Essex said: “I’m thrilled that Lakeside Shopping Centre has signed up to the Skills Pledge and made a public commitment to actively supporting further the development of skills for their employees. FedEx signed the pledge in July and it’s great to see that another large employer such as Lakeside has decided to make the public commitment to workplace training and development. As more businesses sign up, they are all playing an important role in raising skills and competitiveness.”

Lakeside’s commitment to the Skills Pledge is part of an ongoing partnership with Thurrock and Basildon College to improve skills development in the workplace.

Skills Pledge will help council continue to deliver better services

The Chief Executive of Bedfordshire County Council has pledged a commitment to staff development to ensure a better delivery of services both during and beyond the move to create two new unitary authorities.

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive at Bedfordshire County Council, demonstrated the importance the council places on investing in the skills of its staff by signing the Skills Pledge on behalf of the council in October.

Mr Reeves said: “As a Council we face unique challenges ahead in providing services to our communities across Bedfordshire as we move towards the creation of two new unitaries. We will rise to these challenges by investing in our staff’s development. Continuous professional development and skills training is essential for our staff to deliver better services to the people of Bedfordshire, particularly during this time of change.”

“I’m delighted that Bedfordshire County Council has made the Skills Pledge,” said Suzie Webb, Area Director for the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton. “The council already has a comprehensive training programme in place and recognises the importance of having skilled staff and the benefits this can bring to the performance of an organisation. By making the Skills Pledge the council has publicly shown its commitment to continue to develop staff skills and to expand their training provision even further.

“And, as one of the largest employers in the county, with over 4,000 core staff alone, the council has also set a benchmark to other organisations in Bedfordshire to benefit council continue to deliver better services, as well as beyond the move to create two new unitaries.”

After the signing of the Skills Pledge, Steve Chandler was passed the baton onto Steve Chandler
Employers at South Essex Homes boost their skills through free training at work

More than 40 employees at South Essex Homes have already been given the chance to improve their skills and careers by taking part in free training through Train to Gain, and a further 75 members of staff will be taking courses in the near future.

The Southend-on-Sea based housing organisation, which is responsible for the management and maintenance of Southend-on-Sea’s council housing, decided to take advantage of Train to Gain after being advised they were eligible to receive funding for appropriate training.

Forty-two members of staff have already completed NVQ Level 2 qualifications in Customer Service or Team Leading, and in some cases staff have been able to do both courses.

Human Resources manager at South Essex Homes, Christine Ranson, said that they wanted to offer the chance to gain qualifications to as many staff as possible: “A further 75 staff from across the company will be taking Level 2 and Level 3 NVQs in the near future, enabling those staff who have already taken part to continue to higher level qualifications and giving others who haven’t yet been involved the chance to begin training.”

She continued: “A dozen team members will be taking the Housing NVQ Level 2, which is good as this will not only develop their skills, but as an organisation we will make us more resident focused. We’re also in discussions with our training provider, TheLightBulb Ltd. about offering our caretaking staff a Cleaning NVQ as we’re trying to offer appropriate training to anyone across the company who would want it or benefit from it. By offering NVQ training to employees you’re investing in them and their future. Our team is our biggest asset and should be treated as such.”

Lesley Jones, Managing Director of TheLightBulb, said that this kind of training across the company brings benefits not only to the individuals but also the business as a whole and its customers. “Employees taking part in the courses have support from other employees which motivates them and having a large cohort also helps to keep momentum going. The training provides employees with the specific skills they need and means the whole team are talking the same language.”

In 2010-11 over 100,000 people will be helped to gain sustainable employment and to achieve a recognised qualification. We hope this shared ambition will be an incentive for all partners to deliver a system that truly helps individuals into sustainable employment and progression and supports businesses to succeed in the future.”

On 1 December the trialling of the new Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) service began in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk with Norfolk starting on 16 February 2009. The Government has committed to ensuring that an integrated employment and skills service will be in place nationally by 2010 and trialling began on 29 September in the West Midlands.

The delivery of this new service will require improved partnership working between Jobcentre Plus (JCP), careers advice services and training providers along with improved customer services from each partner. To date JCP has focused on helping their customers, who are in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance, into work as quickly as possible.

Whilst moving people into work is at the heart of the IES agenda, the focus will move towards moving people into sustainable employment and providing them with the support they need to progress. IES will empower JCP advisers to look more broadly at the employment and skills needs of individuals and to identify the most appropriate route to return to employment.

Trials will differ slightly from region to region, however there are seven core components across all trials that will test approaches to aspects of the final IES service. Final products and services will continue to evolve as we learn from the trialling experience.

- Enhanced skills screening tools to identify people’s existing skills and their needs relevant to the local labour market
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An independent report commissioned by Edge to coincide with the first ever VQ Day found that over 3,250,000 vocational qualifications were awarded in the UK last year - an 8.3 per cent rise on the year before. This year Edge will build on this research to demonstrate the growing importance of vocational qualifications and the valuable role they play in the UK economy.

For more information about VQ Day, please visit www.vqday.org or contact the VQ Day PR Team on vqday@bbpr.com.

Just some of the staff at South Essex Homes who have benefited from the training.

VQ Day 2009
UK to unite again in celebration of vocational achievements

Following the inaugural VQ Day, which took place last summer, education foundation Edge has now announced that VQ Day 2009 will take place on Wednesday 24th June 2009. The Day will officially be launched at an event at the House of Commons on 4th March 2009.

The aim of VQ Day is to raise the profile of vocational qualifications (VQs) and celebrate the millions of people who gain VQs every year, and those who help them achieve this success. VQ Day 2008 was a huge success. It is hoped that this year’s celebrations will be even bigger and better so colleges, learning providers, awarding bodies, employers and the national careers service will all play their part.

In addition to events around the country, the Day will also feature a national event in London with demonstrations and performances from a range of colleges and learning providers. If you would be interested in participating in the national event, please email vqday@bbpr.com to register your interest.

The VQ Day website will be updated with information for VQ Day 2009, but in the meantime, do encourage people with vocational qualifications to sign up to the VQ Day register of success by visiting www.vqday.org.

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As part of college week at West Suffolk College (WSC), Young Apprentices (YAs) from EAGIT Training visited the college to take part in a bridge building challenge organised by Mike Brett of WSC. Three teams of year 11 students were involved, one from EAGIT, a Norfolk schools team and a Suffolk schools team from WSC.

The challenge was broken into two parts; the first was to build a bridge in the shortest time from materials provided to a given specification. In this challenge each team had a team leader who could organise the work but not get involved in the building work. The task involved applying engineering principles and processes and the challenge was met by using soft, employability skills such as communication, problem solving, organisational skills and essentially teamwork. The result of the challenge was close with the Suffolk schools team just edging ahead of the others.

The second part of the challenge was even more competitive and needed a strong belief in the work of the YAs and their teammates and this involved filling a jug with water. Again teams needed to be focused, efficient and mutually supportive. In this challenge the slow and steady team strategy won the race for the EAGIT team - who made less passes over the course but transported more liquid on each pass.

The whole event was filmed by West Suffolk College including the prize giving of vouchers donated by Clauss Tractors. The Young Apprentices enjoyed the challenge and they all worked hard in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry. Staff from both institutions were on hand to support the event and all agreed that it was a great opportunity to bring the groups together to see what was going on with other YAs in the region. This event is a precursor to a bigger collaboration that EAGIT and West Suffolk College are working on to bring Young Apprentices from both institutions together in an environmental challenge in 2009.

Palmer’s College celebrated its record number of voluntary service students as part of National Colleges Week. Over 80 students dedicated one afternoon a week to help out in the community in between their studies with students volunteering at schools, nurseries, care homes and charities across Thurrock.

Mark Vinall, Principal of Palmer’s College said: “I am extremely proud of the students for devoting their time to helping others in the community. Volunteering is something that the College really encourages as it is highly valuable to the recipients and also improves student skills, CVs and UCAS applications.”

He added: “We’re proud to be part of Colleges Week and think this week long celebration can play a key role in demonstrating the valuable role colleges play in unlocking talent.”

The first ever Colleges Week took place 10-16 November to celebrate the role colleges play in unlocking talent in communities and transforming the lives of learners. Colleges Week is co-ordinated and organised by the Association of Colleges (Aoc), the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS) and the Learning & Skills Council.

A Hertfordshire student is attempting to be the youngest person to sail solo around the world.

Michael Perham, 16 from Potters Bar was featured in the news during Colleges Week as he set sail on his solo voyage from Portsmouth where his only contact with family will be through satellite link-ups during his lonely four months at sea.

The student, from Oaklands College in St Albans, will not be escaping college work and will be taking assignments with him as part of his BTEC National Diploma in Sport (Performance and Excellence).

He is already the youngest person to have sailed across the Atlantic alone. He hopes to achieve this new title when he expects to arrive back in Portsmouth some time near his 17th birthday on the 16 March. The current holder is 18 year old Australian, Jesse Martin, who took the title on 31 October, 1999.

The audience included 90 learning providers, representing about 80 per cent of the region’s learning provider base, and members of the LSC’s VMS project team. The delegates were divided into fifteen groups for facilitated round-table discussions to debate a series of questions. Areas discussed included ‘How ready are you for the Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service?’, ‘Discuss the current situations and trends – how do we maintain performance?’, and ‘What are the barriers and how will we work together to break them down?’

Main discussion points were recorded on Crystal Interactive table PCs with information analysed in more depth and used to prioritise how best to support learning providers through the launch of the VMS and beyond. Delegates then received a summary of the findings.

The event concluded with the announcement of Luton Borough Council as the regional learning provider deemed to have delivered the best overall performance over the last 15 months. The award was judged on performance against the range of criteria: achievement; responsiveness; sharing of good practice; quality of improvement; contribution to growth; and innovation.

Paul Storey commended the winning team and explained that: “Luton Borough Council demonstrated high success rates; has shown responsiveness in working with other providers and partners; is a beacon provider that promotes good practice; has received high gradings from Ofsted; and continues to show good work in many areas, including work with under-represented groups.”
The Big Skill initiative is organised by the Learning and Skills Council in partnership with BBC East to recognise people who have improved their own life or the lives of others through learning. The Big Skill first ran in 2008 and following its success in Norfolk is being rolled out across the region with support from Ray Stubbs and Barbara Follett, Minister for the East of England, who are both championing the initiative.

Ray said: “I am delighted to be supporting The Big Skill and its launch – learning new skills can really improve lives, which is why this is such a worthwhile initiative. It is so important that regardless of age, people continue to learn new skills – it can have such a positive impact on your life and on the lives of others. I wish everyone who enters The Big Skill Awards lots of luck.”

The Big Skill Awards are open to anyone over the age of 14, who lives and learns in the East of England.

Barbara Follett, Minister for the East of England said: “I welcome the opportunity to champion The Big Skill as its awards acknowledge people’s dedication to improve their lives and those of others through learning. As Minister for the East of England, I believe that it is essential to invest in skills across our region in order to ensure that our workforce is world-class by 2020.”

Award nomination forms are available at www.scsc.gov.uk/regions/eastofengland/abo utus/bigskill where forms can be emailed or printed off and posted. Alternatively, please telephone 01234 341200 and request a nomination form to be sent in the post. The closing date for nominations is 5pm on Friday 17 April 2009.

The seven award categories are:
- 14–16 Learner Award
- 17–19 Learner Award
- Adult Learner Award
- Skills for the Community Award
- Skills for Work Award
- Employer Commitment to Skills Award
- The Learners’ Champion Award

A celebration of award winners will take place across the region at events in June - competed by BBC presenters and supported by Ray Stubbs. Local schools, colleges and training providers will also showcase various opportunities available and people will be encouraged to try their hand at learning a new skill.

Sion Simon said, “Since 2001 over a million adults have improved their maths skills and gained qualifications on one of our free courses. In 2009 we hope that our partnership with the BDO will inspire even more adults across the country to improve their maths skills. As well as improving your darts score, brushing up your maths skills can help you get on in work, earn more money and help your kids with their homework.

“Around 6.8 million adults struggle with their maths skills, which is why partnerships like the one with the BDO are so important. We appreciate their continued support in highlighting skills issues, so I’m here to say thank you and encourage adults to take advantage of the free courses available by ringing 0800 66 0800.”

Ollly Croft, Managing Director of BDO Enterprises, said: “From mental arithmetic to geometry, darts is all about maths. As our previous partnership was a success, we are delighted to be supporting the Get On campaign once again.”

The partnership is also being supported by BDO World Professional Darts Championship. During his visit, the Minister renewed the Get On campaign’s successful partnership with the BDO and joined darts legend Bobby George and maths whizz Johnny Ball on stage.

Visiting fellow Dr Ken Bray’s calculations for the Get On campaign shows how darts stars taking to the oche during the championship will have to master geometry, physics and algebra to win their place in the sport’s hall of fame.

To achieve the perfect darts throw, players like 2007 World Champion Martin “Wolfe” Adams must keep their head and upper body completely still, whilst controlling the speed, the angle and the spin of the dart. As Dr Bray states, “The amount of complicated maths that is involved in darts is incredibly impressive. Whether the players know it or not, they are working out complicated geometry and physics whilst choosing from hundreds of possible shot combinations.”

The Minister for Further Education, Sion Simon visited Lakeside on 7 January during the BDO World Professional Darts Championship. During his visit, the Minister renewed the Get On campaign’s successful partnership with the BDO and joined darts legend Bobby George and maths whizz Johnny Ball on stage.

The Big Skill Awards 2009

Darts adds up to sharper maths skills

In January the Get On campaign renewed its partnership with the British Darts Organisation (BDO) following previous successful collaborations. The partnership will again demonstrate how darts can inspire fans to brush up on their maths skills.

New research from The University of Bath shows that the secret of true darts skills is all in the maths. Visiting fellow Dr Ken Bray’s calculations for the Get On campaign shows how darts stars taking to the oche during the championship will have to master geometry, physics and algebra to win their place in the sport’s hall of fame.

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The partnership is also being supported by the TV presenter and maths whizz, Johnny Ball who said, “I think that the partnership is a great idea. So often people don’t realise how much maths is part of their day to day life but as the research shows, brushing up on your maths skills, like mental arithmetic, you are far more likely to hit the magic 180!”

In difficult economic times, good English and maths skills are more important than ever. Research shows that people who lack level 1* maths and English will struggle to get half of the jobs available, whereas those with good skills can earn an additional £50,000 over their lifetime.

At the end of January Get On will team up with some famous football personalities to launch a national competition to get the nation writing new football chants. Football fans are being linguistically creative without even realising it when they create football chants, and the idea is to tap into this enthusiasm for language.

Call free phone 0800 66 0800 or visit www.direct.gov.uk/geton for more information. And for promotional materials email: geton@fishburn-hedges.co.uk.

* Level 1 is equivalent to the standard required to pass a GCSE in maths or English at grades D to G.
In all there were 12 categories with Vic Graves of Learning in Action awarded the winner of the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton sponsored Champion of Learners award. 

Ray Stubbs, TV sports pundit was compare for the evening and the audience entertained with an hilarious speech by former MP and novelist Gyles Brandreth.

Suzie Webb, Area Director for the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton, thanked Premier Newspapers who have been working with the LSC to make the event possible. Commenting ... a great opportunity for us all to come together and to find out how we can all work together to achieve this joint aim.”

On receiving his award Vic said “I am pleased to accept this award on behalf of all those people who I have had the privilege to have worked with over the years developing workplace learning opportunities.”

Awards were presented to organisations which have benefited from the work we have done and it’s nice to know all our efforts have been recognised.

Vic has been working with trade unions in Bedfordshire and Luton since 1994 and set up Trade Union Learning Link in 2001. His vision was to establish an organisation to work with Trade Union organisations to support lifelong learning and workforce development. Over the past seven years he has assisted more than 20 companies through union reps to organise training/learning in the workplace, providing funding, guidance, advice and support. He has achieved particular success in the development and funding of bespoke employer/union based learning centres. There are still shining examples of his work in organisations such as CMMH Luton, 3M, DHL, Argos distribution centre in Kempston and Sanabury’s Luton. These centres are testament to the commitment and passion for sustainable life long learning that Vic conveys to the multiple partners he works with to make learning happen.

Vic has recognised the need in previously untapped potential of over 1370 learners and has mentored and guided learners and union reps through organising both vocational and non vocational training.

Commenting on why he sees this as so important, he said: “For many learners this is the first learning they have participated in since school and to others it has allowed them to progress at work benefiting both the individual and local employers.”

Laurie Evans, Amicus Staff Convenor from CMMH Luton has worked with Vic with Trade Union Learning. He said: “The last year has been very difficult with regards to Trade Union Learning, with decreasing numbers through lack of funding and ever increasing demands in the workplace.”

“He has held the group together when all forms of funding disappeared. Through his enthusiasm he retained a base for his office, structured the group and changed its approach to learning. He alone kept the whole ethos of Trade Union Learning going in the county when others would have walked away.”

Ian MacGuinness, Head Convenor at 3M Ltd and Caroline Hackett, Human Resources at 3M Ltd add “Vic’s experience and expertise has enabled him to apply innovation to learning to the learning projects he has worked on, especially in the complex arena of funding.”

“He has been at the forefront of learning in the local community and his voluntary help and support have been vital in developing partnership learning programmes across the county. Vic’s input and guidance has enabled over 100 learners at 3M to develop themselves and in some cases achieve formal qualifications for the first time.”

It is even more important to invest in training and development during a period of economic downturn.”

“Over 50 employers from businesses of all sizes based at London Luton Airport attended an event at Luton Hoo in November to learn how they could become ready for take off and achieve destination growth by increasing the skills of their workforce.”
Kier Group from Sandy in Bedfordshire were announced as one of just six National Training Award ‘Winners of the Year’ at a gala ceremony in December.

Left to right: Lord Young of Norwood Green (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Apprenticeships), Nick Bird, Hannah O’Sullivan, Paul Sealy (all from Kier Group) and presenter Colin Jackson.

Kier Group was chosen as UK National Training Award Winner of the Year 2008 in the Large Employer category, ahead of 12 other organisations.

Former British hurdles champion and sports commentator Colin Jackson presented the prestigious award at the event held at London’s Royal Lancaster Hotel.

Kier Group is a signatory to the government’s Skills Pledge. It received the Winner of the Year award for investing in training to grow its own talent through its Executive Leadership Programme, which saw more staff appointed to director positions and staff turnover drop.

The judging panel was particularly impressed with how this programme met the needs of the business and delivered real business results whilst also demonstrating a strong commitment to the corporate social responsibility agenda. The judges considered the training programme itself to be of an excellent standard, with thorough planning, clear senior management buy-in and a strong commitment to continuous improvement.

The National Training Awards celebrate organisations and individuals that achieve outstanding business and personal success through investment in training. They are run on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills by UK Skills, a not-for-profit organisation that champions vocational skills and learning for work. The Awards are sponsored by City & Guilds (premier sponsor) and CIPD. They are also supported by Investors in People.

UK Skills Chief Executive, Simon Bartley, said: “I am delighted at both the broad range and high standard of the organisations and individuals who have entered this year. The new, more streamlined entry and awards system has encouraged a very diverse range of entries and record numbers. The winners have demonstrated that training is an investment not only a cost and that it can transform companies, careers and communities. I congratulate Kier Group on what it has achieved.”

Skills Minister, Lord Tony Young, added: “In today’s challenging economy, a highly skilled workforce is more important than ever before. Even when firms go through lean financial times, a training programme that is tailored to the specific needs of a business can transform employee and company performance.

“I am pleased to congratulate all the winners here today, as well as the employers who realise that training is an essential ingredient of a successful business, not an optional extra.”

The 2009 National Training Awards open for entries in January. For more information phone 0800 0191 475 or visit www.nationaltrainingsawards.com.

Bedfordshire company wins top National Training Award

Caroline Neville visited Mymar Training in Huntingdon in December to present them with the East of England Train to Gain Provider of the Year Award.

Mymar Training was chosen to receive the award in recognition of its outstanding performance and responsiveness to the needs of employers throughout the academic year. The Huntingdonshire based training provider has grown over the last two years to become one of the foremost providers of vocational training in Cambridgeshire and the East of England offering Apprenticeships, NVQs and a wide variety of self-learn and e-learning courses in partnership with LearnDirect across a range of industry sectors.

Chris Nugent said: “Winning this award means such a lot. Every consortium member and all staff have worked very hard to make our involvement in Train to Gain successful. We are very lucky to have staff which show such dedication and give our learners so much support.

That their efforts have been officially recognised makes me very proud. This award gives me the opportunity to thank and congratulate all our members of staff for their efforts and for the support they have shown throughout the Train to Gain programme.”

Caroline Neville presents the award to Chris Nugent, Managing Director of Mymar Training, in the company of Mymar colleagues and partners from the consortium.

Providers of the month

Two of the most established Training Providers in the East of England Train to Gain were awarded Provider of the Month as the LSC recognise and award outstanding achievement.

Construction Learning World, the largest provider of the construction industry training and assessment services in the UK who have recently been awarded the Training Quality Standard with excellence in Construction were chosen for September. Over the last two years they have a total of 2,327 learners who have started a qualification through Train to Gain. Andy Wood, Funding Manager, accepted the award on behalf of his organisation.

Cambridge Regional College has delivered Train to Gain since the service began and in that time a total of 4,705 learners have taken a qualification through the College and its delivery partners. The College was chosen as Train to Gain Provider of the Month for October and Laraine Moody, Assistant Principal Employment and Skills accepted the award.

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Caroline Neville visits Mymar Training...
Two Essex education consortia praised by Ofsted

The NOVA Partnership, Essex’s largest provider of Apprenticeships and Thames Gateway Train to Gain consortia have been awarded as ‘Good’ in the first ever Ofsted inspection of an Apprenticeship or Train to Gain consortia in the country.

As the UK moves from a credit crunch to recession, training and re-skilling will become of paramount importance so these two groups will have an increasingly important role to play in the lives of people from Essex, which makes Ofsted’s approval even more significant.

The two groups, both headed up by South East Essex College, are made up of 16 of the biggest and best known local training and education providers that span right across Essex.

Combined, the groups offer everything from animal care, engineering, retail, law, ICT health and hairdressing and between them have an impressive 2,994 learners.

Ofsted found that links with employers were particularly strong and that both the effectiveness and quality of provision was good, where learners gained good work-related skills.

They also found that NOVA and Train to Gain’s provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is ‘Good’ as they both offer a wide range of work-based learning in Essex and have been particularly successful at targeting provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners.

The inspectors highlighted a number of overall strengths of both consortia. This included: the good development of learner work-based skills; very good strategic and operational management; leaders and managers at all levels judged as ‘Outstanding’ in the way that they set a clear direction, leading to improvement and the promotion of high quality care and training of learners. The inspectors highlighted ‘Outstanding’ collaborative partnership working and very good links with employers.

Inspectors were particularly impressed with the successful development of provision to meet learners’ needs which they judged ‘Outstanding’.

Lisa MacCormac, Partnership Manager for NOVA, which has seen recruitment increase by 40 per cent in 2007-08, said: “As Ofsted mentioned in their report we are hitting many of our targets and have acknowledged that ‘collaborative working between partners is outstanding’. Today in education and training you have to work together as a team to help fulfil the needs of the local people and the local economy and this report is validating proof of that.”

Any areas that required improvement have been identified through self-assessment and improvement planning is already underway. However, inspectors acknowledged that Train to Gain is still a very new provision and the improvements are planned.

Mandy Norris, Development Manager for Thames Gateway Train to Gain, added: “Overall, we are judged to have ‘Good’ provision in Train to Gain, which has experienced a very rapid growth in learner numbers. This hopefully puts the provision on course for an ‘Outstanding’ grade at the next inspection.”

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The 2009 Apprenticeship Awards are now underway. Providers are leading the way by encouraging their employers and apprentices to enter.

Now in its sixth year the competition has been growing rapidly. We are searching for exemplar companies and talented individuals that have benefited from the Apprenticeship programme so that their achievements can be recognised and celebrated.

Employers can enter one of five categories depending on the number of employees they have and individuals can enter for an Apprenticeship, Advanced Apprenticeship or Young Apprenticeship award. This year for the first time all applications will be submitted and processed electronically via www.apprenticeships.org.uk/awards.

Closing Date: Friday 27 February
Regional Awards Ceremony: 2 June at the Hilton Hotel Stansted

Harlow: a learning town

The big issues today are global and local: social and economic stability and constant regeneration. Both require investment in community confidence and coherent ‘big-picture’ planning.

Harlow is a ‘new town’ built in the post-war years around areas of outstanding beauty and historical significance. Harlow 2020 is a local strategic partnership that helps to bring community pride and a sense of future direction. A long history of partnership working: public, private and voluntary sectors have cooperated for many years and helped create strong working relationships and agree common goals.

In the last year or so, Harlow 2020 has prioritized and focused on aspirations for a better future for the town, its employers and its citizens.

In 2007 Councillor Lorna Spenceley, (Chairman of the Council), commissioned an inquiry into the aspirations of and for young people supported by the 2020 education, learning and skills action group. Employers and local service providers were engaged to canvass views and identify solutions to obstacles getting in the way of higher personal and community expectations. The final report highlighted the importance of lateral thinking and joined-up planning: aspiration is a key issue for the whole town. The findings helped to identify a wealth of activity at every age and stage of learning, providing Harlow 2020 with a catalogue of work they can celebrate and develop further in the coming years.

In 2008, Harlow offered a town-wide Children’s Centre network, providing support for families with young children on six sites. Primary schools have revamped the curriculum to assert the value of creativity and interpersonal skills, alongside core competencies. GCSE standards across the town have improved 100 per cent and more in the last decade, due to targeted work tackling the causes of underachievement. The diminishing numbers of Harlow NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) owed much to providing better information, advice and guidance - such as the Harlow Youth Cafe. The local presence of Anglia Ruskin University is bringing a new level of ambition within reach of local people.

A variety of initiatives to support entrepreneurs, enhance skills in the workplace and promote education employer partnership have attracted funding, sponsorship and new connections.

The community itself has become Harlow’s hidden treasure and those working in the 2020 arena know that partnership working works and Harlow has become a learning town.

Minister visits Hertfordshire to deliver skills messages to local partners

The Minister for the East of England, Barbara Follett visited the University of Hertfordshire in December to deliver skills messages set out in the Pre Budget Report to local partners.

Meeting with representatives from the University of Hertfordshire, local businesses and Learning and Skills Council Hertfordshire, the Minister also learned more about how the University, which is one of the UK’s leading business-facing Universities, is engaging with businesses to create employment opportunities for students and the wider community.

Barbara Follett said: “Now, more than ever before, it is important that businesses in the East of England invest in the training of their staff to improve their work skills. The University of Hertfordshire is doing excellent work in this area and I commend them for it. In the current uncertain economic climate, the more skilled our workforce is the better our productivity will be and the latter is essential if Britain wants to compete in today’s global economy.”

“The Government is doing its bit too and has invested £350m in its flagship Train to Gain scheme. This helps small businesses to train their staff, support professionalism and deal with the management of business-as-usual pressures. In the last academic year, 18,390 Eastern Region learners benefited from this scheme and I hope that more and more people will take advantage of it in the future.”

The Government has recently announced that the University of Hertfordshire has become part of its University Enterprise Networks (UENs) which brings together the universities that commit to provide students with business education and training.
The centre, part of the North Hertfordshire College group is based in Letchworth Garden City and 60 representatives from key local businesses and organisations attended the event. It offers a wide range of training for businesses including bespoke training solutions for leadership and management, accredited coaching programmes and workshops and professional qualifications.

The centre has been awarded the new Training Quality Standard and the Consortium for Business which delivers £5 million worth of employer based training has based its sales and marketing team at the Goldsmith Centre.

Lord Salisbury gave the assembled business community an assessment of the global economy and the implications for Hertfordshire. He anticipated significant changes and hardship as the economy contracts and the cost of the credit boom becomes apparent.

He did however state that the Goldsmith Centre for Business will be a key driver in developing the skills that local businesses will require, to become more competitive in a changing market place.

Fintan Donohue, Chief Executive and Principal of North Hertfordshire College said: “The launch of the new centre marks a new chapter in the college’s work with employers locally and regionally.

“We hope that employers will feel a sense of ownership of the centre and as they use it to support their business objectives, we expect to form stronger and more profitable partnerships with many new organisations.”

Jeff Wren, Area Director for LSC Hertfordshire, said: “The newly refurbished Goldsmith Centre will provide a first class facility for the local business community.

“Workplace training and skills development is crucial to create a highly trained, skilled and competitive workforce. As the home to the largest Train to Gain contract in the East of England, our vision is for the Goldsmith Centre to underpin the growth in workplace training and act as the focal point for Train to Gain in the local area. The LSC views this as a local priority and invested £500,000 towards the major redesign of the centre to help achieve this.

You can find out more by visiting the Goldsmith Centre for Business website www.gc4b.com

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The Learning and Skills Council rewarded a business from Stevenage and one of its employees with the accolades of Apprentice and Employer of the Year for 2008 at a presentation in November.

At the event hosted by the University of Hertfordshire, MBDA UK of Stevenage was named as Hertfordshire’s Employer of the Year in the LSC’s Apprenticeship Awards 2008, while one of MBDA’s Apprentices, Janet Mansell was recognised as Hertfordshire’s Apprentice of the Year. The winner of the Entry to Employment learner of the year for Hertfordshire 2008 was also announced as Garry Sheehan from Hemel Hempstead.

Jeff Wren, Area Director for LSC Hertfordshire presented the winners with certificates and said; “MBDA UK is an example to other businesses. The company is proud that investing in your employees by ensuring they have the skills to work effectively has a huge impact on motivation, staff retention and business success. It is also great to see a company prioritising training people from the local area and thus contributing to the local community and economy. We want to see more businesses operating like MBDA UK. I would also like to congratulate Janet and Garry both on their personal achievements too. They are both a motivation to all young people who can aspire to follow their example.”

Garry Sheehan made remarkable progress whilst studying on the Entry to Employment programme. Garry battled on with a quiet determination and growing self-belief to successfully complete his course, achieving qualifications in catering and literacy and ultimately securing paid employment at the Way In Christian Café in Berkhamsted as a chef. Garry continues to volunteer at various community projects, including the Reach Out project, the local Night Shelter and the St Albans Narrow Boat Project, where he accompanies disabled adults on weekend trips away to enable their carers to have some respite.

To encourage even more Hertfordshire students to consider taking the Apprenticeship route, a new resource pack was unveiled at the event. Produced by the Hertfordshire Provider Network (a network of 24 Apprenticeship and Entry to Employment learning providers) the pack aims to encourage even more people into Apprenticeships in Hertfordshire. It has been designed to help education professionals deliver an engaging and interactive lesson, giving students an introduction to Apprenticeships.

The pack will help teachers, tutors, lecturers and career advisors illustrate the benefits of Apprenticeships to students who might be considering starting their career as an Apprentice. It features a DVD telling the stories of 10 people taking part in an Apprenticeship, an interactive multiple choice quiz and a guide to opportunities in their local area.
**Young people say ‘YESS’ to work**

A Hertfordshire scheme has helped over 220 young people find their first job, thanks to funding from the Learning and Skills Council.

The Young Employee Support Scheme (YESS) is run by Youth Connexions in Hertfordshire in close partnership with the Learning and Skills Council.

The scheme was initially targeted at young people who were not in employment or education, but since it launched in December 2007 it has helped to match over 228 young people with 145 businesses to help young people take their first step onto the career ladder.

The match-making service links young job-seekers with local businesses, placing them in junior or trainee positions. The young employees benefit from workplace training, such as NVQs or on-the-job training programmes, along with mentoring, support from a Youth Connexions advisor and peer support.

Leila Borgia, part-owner of the salon, said; “We went again to find their new trainee. Amiee started with us in April 2008. The YESS scheme provided funds for training and has helped to save on recruitment costs too.”

Award-winning Gentry Hair Salon in Goffs Oak registered for a full-time trainee with YESS in February 2008. They had used the service successfully in the past so looked to it again to find their new trainee. Simona Vincini, part-owner of the salon said; “We were really pleased with the Youth Connexions process. We had more response through YESS than anywhere else and the quality of the CVs was exceptionally good. We pride ourselves in supporting young people in our team to progress via training and wanted to offer our new trainee the opportunity to obtain an NVQ level 1 as well as getting hands on experience.” Stacey saw the vacancy on the Youth Connexions website and after three interviews with Gentry she was hired as their latest trainee. She said; “It was great - I would definitely recommend the YESS scheme to other young people.”

**Two local businesses that have said YESS:**

Pikes Estate Agents in Hatfield is just one Hertfordshire business that has found a young employee through YESS.

In April 2008 they registered a vacancy for a trainee lettings administrator, as they were struggling to find the right person for the role.

Alan Pike, owner of Pikes Estate Agents explains; “We were looking for a young person with good computer skills, a good telephone manner and confidence when dealing with customers. The candidate also needed to have a good eye for detail, flexibly and be able to multi-task. The YESS scheme came up trumps and paired us with Amiee, who fitted our requirements exactly. Amiee started with us in April 2008. The YESS scheme provided funds for training and helped to support both the business and Amiee through the first few months. It didn’t cost us a penny to use the service, so it really helped to save on recruitment costs too.”

Lord Young keynote speaker at Skills Pledge breakfast

Caroline Neville said: “During this challenging economic climate it is more important than ever to invest in training and development. A skilled workforce enables employers to stay competitive, achieve maximum growth and realise the full potential of their business.

“Employers who sign the Skills Pledge not only recognise the business benefits of training but are also helping to invest in the future success of our local economy.”

Lord Young was the keynote speaker at a ‘skills pledge’ breakfast organised by Norfolk Chamber of Commerce which saw four Norfolk organisations make a public commitment to bring the qualifications of their staff to at least five A-C grade GCSEs.

“Firms that fail to invest in training could pay a high price during the downturn.”

That was the message to small and medium-size businesses from skills minister Lord Young at a meeting of 140 business leaders in Norfolk. Lord Young was joined on the stage by the event at Dunston Hall, near Norwich in November, by Caroline Neville, Regional Director for the LSC East of England.

The minister said that giving workers better skills would help businesses weather the economic climate and emerge from the recession in good shape - and pledged the government would help businesses foot the bill for training. He warned that businesses that failed to invest in training were twice as likely to fail during a downturn, than firms which tried to equip their workforce with new skills.
The region was delighted to have the opportunity to host a National Test Bed workshop. Visitors were invited to HMP... and several of the industrial workshops. Lunch was catered for by some of the... below) and also several of the industrial workshops.

The main purpose of the conference was to... their knowledge of the changes that will... many of their teachers. It’s truly inspiring that young people can come into a nurtured environment like this and work with a real variety of different people including experienced adults, it really helps the children to put everything into a context that’s meaningful to them.”

The work produced by the children will be... opportunities that are currently being developed by the Learning and Skills Council and the Suffolk 14-19 Strategy Team.

The Choices for Me 14-19 Conference for Young People organised by BT and the Suffolk 14-19 Strategy Team was held at Adastral Park, Ipswich in October.

The East of England Test Bed, which is taking forward the ideas which were set out in the policy document ‘Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps,’ has now entered its third and final phase. The work of the Test Bed is based on the premise that employment is a key factor in reducing re-offending; so there is a strong case for improving the skills of offenders and helping them find work. Employment is therefore a key aspect of the work produced by the children will be... opportunities that are currently being developed by the Learning and Skills Council and the Suffolk 14-19 Strategy Team.

In March this year, Phillip went to Tanzania with the BT Apprentice Challenge to help build a school and raise money for local children to get access to food and an education. He said: “The challenge Africa... ”

Designed to be both fun and challenging, the overall aim of the day was for the pupils to develop a much better understanding of why change is happening in education and what the future will hold in terms of learning opportunities that are currently being developed by the Learning and Skills Council and the Suffolk 14-19 Strategy team.

The choice of Apprenticeships. Pupils at the event were asked to develop marketing materials to promote the future of learning to other young people which included tasks to encourage aspects of team work, identify key messages, use different mediums of communication and working to tight deadlines.

The young people were divided up into groups of twenty led by experts from the world of Education, Information Technology, Media Technology, Radio, Marketing and Public Relations. A variety of marketing materials were produced including radio adverts, short films, a written advert, a newsletter article and a short photo movie for web marketing.

The day finished with presentations of the pupils’ work and a moving Mike evaluation of each of the teams’ efforts by a panel of experts. Danielle Burrows a teacher from Stoke high school commented: “Young people in year nine will soon be making crucial choices about the future of their education and are often unaware of the vast array of options that are available to them as many of their teachers. It’s truly inspiring that

business in the Community (BITC) was commissioned by the Test Bed to host five ‘Seeing Is Believing’ events at Chelmsford, Highpoint, Wayland and Hollesley Bay Prisons, and also in the Essex Probation Area. The aim of the visits was to enable employers and other groups, such as voluntary organisations, to see the training delivered to help offenders become more employable. The feedback from the visits has been very positive, with one particular group having arranged a further meeting to explore their future involvement.

For more information, visit www.Future-fme.org.uk or call Kath Ridealgh on 01473 883308 and email kath.ridealgh@educ.suffolkcc.gov.uk

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Meet Norfolk Apprentice of the Year

A 20-year-old from Aylsham has been named Norfolk’s Apprentice of the Year by the Learning and Skills Council.

Phillip East is a customer service engineer for Openreach, part of the BT Group, and is responsible for the provision and maintenance of local access communications networks within an engineering team. He joined the company on an Advanced Apprenticeship in 2005 from Easton College which he completed in August. Phillip said: “Doing the Apprenticeship has allowed me to develop core skills so that I can get better at my job and progress within the company. I’ve also had fantastic opportunities I otherwise wouldn’t have had which have made a huge difference to my confidence and overall ability. I’ve completed training with the Territorial Army’s 81st signal squadron, built a mini-telephone exchange to simulate 999 calls, worked with the Scouts and educated children about the environment.”

Phillip has also taken on responsibility for coaching and mentoring other apprentices at Openreach, and has helped with their inductions and organising team events as well as more routine duties such as carrying out safety and quality checks on their work. He said: “It’s been really rewarding to coach more junior apprentices and be involved in their development. I’ve also helped them with their training and in learning skills for their job if they have any issues, it’s sometimes easier to talk to someone who has recently been in the same position as them.”

While on the course, Phillip has gained a BTEC in telecommunications and was the first in his team to complete an NVQ in ICT. He is currently working towards a degree in Business Management through the Open University. In recognition of being named Norfolk’s Apprentice of the Year, Phillip was presented with a certificate and a £50 voucher by Graham Brough, Area Director for LSC Norfolk.

Graham Brough said: “Phillip has achieved so much on his Apprenticeship, not least being able to help to use his experience to help other apprentices. It’s great to see that he is continuing to learn by studying for a degree that will further improve his skills and allow him to progress within the company.”

In March this year, Phillip went to Tanzania with the BT Apprentice Challenge to help build a school and raise money for local children to get access to food and an education. He said: “The challenge Africa trip was a truly amazing experience, not only do we manage to make a difference to local African communities, but I have been able to apply my new skills into the work place.”

For further information on the East of England Test Bed speak to Val Chiesa, OLASS Regional Manager on 01727 733 568 (val.chiesa@lsc.gov.uk), or Diana Edwards, Test Bed Project Manager on 01733 425 235 (di.edwards46@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

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