BMG Research

Report

Evaluation of Employer Satisfaction with the National Employer Training Programme/Train to Gain Brokerage – First and Second Wave

A Report for the Learning and Skills Council National Office

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Because people matter.
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1 Executive Summary

Background

The Train to Gain service is intended to build upon the experience of Employer Training Pilots, and is available to employers as an independent and impartial brokerage service to diagnose business needs and source appropriate training provision. Brokers are contracted by the LSC to deliver the service, which is presently moving from its pilot phase towards full national roll out. Train to Gain is available to all employers, but brokers will primarily target new, small and ‘hard to reach’ businesses.

This report documents the first two waves of evaluation of the pilot phase of the service, and covers employers contacted in April and May 2006 and June and July 2006. Evaluation is intended to ascertain employer ratings of importance and satisfaction about eleven key measures related to the service.

In the second wave, 828 interviews were achieved with employers from a total of 2,500 contacts provided by brokers. These interviews are combined with those of the first wave of the evaluation which involved 456 interviews with employers in April and May 2006 (from 1,256 contacts) and measures are reported based on the total number of interviews to date (1,284). Some comparisons are made between the first and second waves.

Employer Characteristics

The second wave involved a larger number of employer contacts and the regional distribution reflects that, with fewer concentrations of employers in certain areas. Employers are most likely to be based in the West Midlands and the North West.

In both the first and second waves, a significant minority (39% on average) of respondents represented the Health and Social Work sector. Other significant sectors, although represented by far fewer respondents, include Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale, Retail and Repair and Renting and Business Activities.

The majority of respondent employers (73%) have less than 50 employees, but the proportion of respondents that are micro-businesses is much lower than one would expect given their representation in the business population UK-wide.

Awareness of and access to the broker service

Training providers and word of mouth are the most common first sources of awareness of the brokerage service. Word of mouth has increased in significance in the second wave, reflecting the fact that the initiative is becoming more widely established.

Telephone is, by far, the most frequent means of first accessing the Train to Gain broker service.
Characteristics of the Broker Service

Importance and Satisfaction

Employer evaluations of using the brokerage service were delivered using a simple questionnaire which assessed employer ratings of importance and satisfaction of a series of 11 measures, grouped under three headings – impartiality, responsiveness and knowledge.

Scores for both importance and satisfaction are for all criteria relatively high, barely falling below 8 out of 10 for any measure. For most measures the average importance score is a little higher than the average satisfaction score.

Consistently high importance scores confirm that we are evaluating aspects of the service which employers think are important. High satisfaction scores are an indication that there is widespread employer approval of the service. However there are areas where satisfaction scores do not match up to importance scores and the need for improvement is signalled.

The brokers’ ability to identify potential funding to support training activities is the most important issue for employers, followed by broker knowledge and expertise. Both these issues score above 9 out of a possible 10 for importance. Elements of broker knowledge which focus on applying individual solutions to employers’ needs follow in the hierarchy of importance.

Employers find it easier to identify what they want than to assess what they get. Satisfaction scores fall into a narrower range. Ranking satisfaction scores suggest that the biggest shortfalls are translating needs into action plans, and the speed of follow up activity.

Statistical analysis suggests that the priorities for service improvement are to do with the ability of brokers to identify funding to support training, the speed of follow up and the ability of brokers to translate the needs of the company into an action plan.

Impartiality

The broker’s understanding of employer training and development needs is the most important of the three impartiality criteria measured, and also the one where satisfaction falls furthest behind importance.

One in twenty employers are dissatisfied with brokers’ ability to signpost a range of providers. Although this is a small proportion, it is relatively high compared with levels of dissatisfaction in other areas.

Responsiveness

The ease of getting hold of a broker is rated more highly than the ease of accessing other staff to help with queries. Both can be viewed as ‘process’ issues and although employers are less concerned, they are important in terms of ensuring overall satisfaction with involvement in Train to Gain.

There is a clear shortfall between importance and satisfaction in relation to the speed of follow up actions – underlining that employers are particularly concerned with outputs, as opposed to process and suggesting that some brokers are underperforming with regard to basic customer service.
Knowledge

Knowledge measures are the most important aspects of the service as far as employers are concerned, with funding identification, broker expertise and knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain being the most important of all.

There is a clear shortfall between importance and satisfaction in terms of funding identification and translating corporate needs into an action plan. Improvements in these areas are likely to have a positive impact on the overall perception of Train to Gain, although it has to be recognised that funding issues are governed by external factors.

Overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the Train to Gain service is high, and its score is equal to that of the average for the eleven individual measures (8.30, compared with 8.27). A third of respondents (34%) score the service as 10 out of 10, whilst about 5% are clearly dissatisfied.

Improving the Train to Gain broker service

Suggested improvements to the service largely reflect issues raised in relation to individual performance measures. Many of these are to do with service delivery to be tackled on an individual basis by brokers. They include improving communication between brokers and employers, making more funding available, providing a faster and more efficient service, providing more follow up support and providing a service and training solutions that are more tailored to the employers’ business needs.
2 Background

Policy context

Delivery of the National ‘Train to Gain’ programme began in April 2006, initially in existing Employer Training Pilot (ETP) areas, and its national roll out is planned for November 2006.

Train to Gain focuses on developing the supply side capacity to meet employers’ needs, raising the demand for skills and supporting the introduction of a national network of brokers. It is anticipated that the programme will engage with 175,000 learners and 50,000 employers each year.

The central aim of the 2005 Skills White Paper¹ is to raise national skill levels to enable individuals to realise their potential and businesses to become more wealth creating and economically successful.

Work has been underway to achieve these goals, with an entitlement to training for a first full Level 2 (L2E) qualification having been trialled for low skilled adults (of whom there are an estimated 6.6 million in the workforce), in the South East and North East regions as part of a wider offer of support to individuals. This entitlement to training was extended across the whole of England in August 2005².

Focussing on the needs of employers, Employer Training Pilots (ETP) have been running since September 2002. These pilots have been used to test an offer to employers comprising a range of financial incentives and support designed to encourage them to release staff to take Skills for Life (including literacy and numeracy) and NVQ Level 2 training, delivered flexibly at a time and place to suit their needs.

Train to Gain has been developed from aspects of best practice from Employer Training Pilots (ETP). ETPs tested the effectiveness of an offer of free or subsidised training to employees without a level 2 qualification, wage compensation (of various levels) to their employers for giving time off to train plus access to information, advice and guidance.

The Pilots have been administered by local Learning and Skills Councils in partnership with local Business Links and other agencies, through a network of local brokers or learning advisers and training providers. They were originally planned to run in six areas for a year, but were subsequently extended to cover 12 areas for an additional year and again, from September 2004, to run for a total of three years in the Phase 1 areas, two years in the Phase 2 areas and for a year in five new areas plus a regional pilot in the North East.

The Pilot LSC areas have been as follows:

- Berkshire
- Birmingham and Solihull
- Derbyshire
- Devon and Cornwall

¹ 2005 White Paper ‘Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work’
² LSC Level 2 Entitlement Design Framework
The first year evaluation\(^3\) of the pilots found that they used varied approaches to marketing which demonstrated that they needed to be active in approaching employers. The evaluation also found that employers were attracted to ETP mainly by the free and flexibly-provided training, although wage compensation can be important in some circumstances. It also identified that the vast majority of employers saw potential benefits in terms of providing employees with better skills and self-confidence and thought that this fitted well with their business plans.

**The scope of Train to Gain**

It is fundamental to understand that Train to Gain is a service to employers rather than a programme. Train to Gain is building on the lessons learned from the ETP pilots, and is not an extension of these pilots. Train to Gain marks a new way of working with employers, which is designed to put their business and skill development needs first through identifying clear and comprehensive solutions.

**The Train to Gain core offer**

The Train to Gain service available to employers is an independent and impartial brokerage service to diagnose business need and source appropriate training provision. The brokerage service provides:

- a comprehensive analysis of and solution to training needs;
- easy access to relevant and flexible, high quality training;
- information and support to access a wide range of training packages;
- information and advice to employees on qualifications and training;
- support for organisations wishing to work within the principles of Investors in People (IiP), and;
- support to develop ongoing strategies to address future training needs.

The skills brokerage element of Train to Gain is central to the service with 30 broker contractor delivering impartial demand led and business focused advice across England. The role of the broker is key in helping employers to assess their skills and training priorities. The role of brokers can be summarised as follows:

- use brokers working towards a national standard and participating in a national training and development programme;
- be impartial and easy to access;
- be integrated with the generalist brokerage service to be offered under the Business Link brand;
- build on resources currently available in each region;
- be underpinned by quality assurance arrangements, and;
- be governed by agreements setting out the delivery criteria for brokers and by employer satisfaction surveys.

Brokers may also provide specialist support on sector specific issues. This support could include information on qualification frameworks, delivery models, funding, availability of provision and up to date intelligence on their specific sectors.

Sector brokers will also be able to advise employers on the qualifications and mode of delivery etc which meet the industry standards and priorities set out in Sector Skills Agreements.

In all cases brokers will provide an independent and impartial service, regardless of the organisation employing them and will act on behalf of employers to:

- provide them with the best possible advice on the skills training that will support their business need;
- design and cost integrated training packages, which define clearly which elements are government funded and which the employer will have to pay for, and;
- source training from the most appropriate provider.

Although it is recognised that many employers already go directly to a learning provider if they are clear about the training they need, Train to Gain will be available to all employers, although brokers will primarily target new and small and harder to reach businesses.
Survey background

Purpose of report

This report documents the first two waves of evaluation of the pilot phase of the Train to Gain service, and, as such, builds on the understanding of the impact of the service at an early stage. This report covers contacts made by brokers during April and May 2006 (first wave) and June and July 2006 (second wave), with further waves of evaluation assessing contacts made in August, September and subsequent months currently ongoing. The successive waves of evaluation and their associated reports are intended to identify both employer ratings of importance of aspects of the service, and their satisfaction with the delivery of those elements, and to evaluate the relationship between the two. This will provide a basis for assessing the overall levels of satisfaction with the service, and also insight into those areas where improvement in delivery and hence satisfaction would improve the quality of the service overall.

Methodology

In total, in this second wave of evaluation, we have been supplied with approximately 2,500 contacts from brokers, comprising their Train to Gain contacts with employers for the months of June and July. All of these employers were called to request an evaluation interview, delivered over the phone using BMG’s in-house CATI system and call centre. In addition to the 828 achieved interviews, 5% of contacts remained as potential appointments once fieldwork ceased. About 25% of contacts claimed to have no dealings with a broker, whilst the remainder either refused interview, or proved difficult to secure any form of direct contact with (answering machines, lines busy, no reply etc).

Each respondent was taken through a relatively short questionnaire, which in turn sought their evaluation of importance and satisfaction on a series of eleven measures in three groups, and also asked a series of supplementary questions about initial contact with brokers, overall satisfaction, and suggested improvements to the delivery of the service.

Report contents

This report presents measures based on the first two waves of the evaluation. The second wave’s measures are reported alongside the first wave so that comparisons can be easily made. However, where measures are reported on the basis of region, employment size and sector they are based on all employer interviews conducted to date i.e. the two waves combined.
3 Characteristics of Employers

In total, the first two waves of interviews in the project comprised 1,284 respondent employers. This chapter provides a brief description of their characteristics by region, sector and size.

Region

Figure 1

The distribution of respondents by region in the second wave differs from that of the first wave due to more new brokers coming on board and the increase in the number of contacts available. A third of respondents in the second wave are based in the North West, twice as many as are based in the next most frequently represented regions of the South West, North East and the West Midlands. The figure below compares the regional distribution within the two waves.
Figure 2

REGION IN WHICH EMPLOYERS ARE BASED, BY WAVE (ALL RESPONDENTS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humberside</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures in parentheses denote sample bases. * denotes less than 0.5%
Across the two waves there is broad representation of sectors. By far the largest sector in terms of number of respondents continues to be the Health and Social Work sector, comprising 39% of employers interviewed. The second largest sector in the sample is Manufacturing (12%) and the sectors of Construction, Wholesale, Retail and Repair and Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities are each represented by 9% of respondents.

There is little difference between the two waves in this respect, although there is notably a small increase in representation from Construction employers and a slight decrease in the proportion of Wholesale, Retail and Repair employers in the sample.
The sample of respondents comprises a broad range in terms of size. More than a quarter are micro-businesses (1-10 employees) (29%) but a higher proportion (44%) have between 11 and 49 employees. The remainder (27%) have at least 50 employees and this proportion includes 8% that have 200 or more.

Between the first and second waves, the proportion of micro-businesses in the sample has increased slightly. This is at the expense of businesses with between 11 and 199 employees.
4  Awareness of and access to the Broker service

Hearing about the broker service

Respondents were questioned (without a prompted list) about the manner in which they first heard about the Train to Gain broker service, and the answers given are presented in Figure 5:

- Training providers are the most common first point of contact with the brokerage service, and this is perhaps not surprising since these are in many cases the main contracted delivery agents for the service;

- Word of mouth has grown in significance as a source of awareness since the first wave and is now second most frequently cited (increasing from 12% in the first wave to 16% in the second wave). This is to be expected as a service/initiative gains ground;

- Business Link remains an important source of awareness but has been less frequently cited as such in the second wave (9%, compared with 17% in the first wave);

- LSCs remain the fourth most common source of first contact. Their importance in this respect is to be expected given LSCs’ pivotal role in driving the Train to Gain service forward.
Accessing the service

Figure 6

WAYS IN WHICH RESPONDENTS FIRST ACCESSED THE BROKER SERVICES - UNPROMPTED (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Again without prompting, respondent employers were asked how they first accessed the broker service, and the service is continuing to make most use of telephone as its first contact medium. Provider referrals are also important but mentioned by far fewer respondent employers. No more than one in twenty employer respondents make use of any other modes of contact.
5 Characteristics of the Broker Service

The primary aim of our work in evaluating employer satisfaction with the National Employer Training Pilots and the Train to Gain service is to assess employer satisfaction with the delivery of the service, and to establish the first of a set of time series measures which provide a clear understanding of levels of satisfaction over time. This chapter outlines the rationale and approach taken by the study in measuring both importance and satisfaction against a number of criteria falling into three measurement criteria – impartiality, responsiveness and knowledge of brokers – as reported by employers.

Importance and Satisfaction

Employers’ evaluations of their experiences of the NETP/TTG brokerage service were delivered using a simple questionnaire, which assessed employer ratings first of the importance, and then of their satisfaction with the delivery, of a series of 11 broker performance measures, under three broad headings – impartiality, responsiveness and knowledge.

Our decision to measure both importance and satisfaction is fundamental to our approach, since expectations – what employers consider to be important – can have a central role in influencing satisfaction.

Sources of Expectations

As the diagram above indicates, expectations – what employers consider to be the most important factors in delivering the brokerage service – are driven by a range of issues, including the employer’s needs, their previous experience, and the manner in which the nature of the brokerage service is communicated to them.

In measuring both importance and satisfaction, we are able to go beyond an absolute measure of service satisfaction, to one which relates that level of satisfaction to the factors which are most important to employers – and hence whether delivery is meeting, exceeding or falling short of expectations.
In turn, this is important at a number of levels. Clearly where performance falls short of importance, then this flags a need to improve the perception of performance in service delivery (which may require a significant change in the actual level of performance for that change to be perceived by employers). Conversely, where performance exceeds levels of reported importance, this may flag to us that effort is being placed wrongly, and that resources are being consumed delivering an output which is not as important to the recipient in relative terms.

In putting together an overall picture of performance against importance for the Train to Gain Service, we have compared the average score given for performance and importance against each of the eleven assessment criteria, and plotted them on the chart shown overleaf.
In general, close correlation between importance and satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW IMPORTANCE</td>
<td>LOW SATISFACTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH IMPORTANCE</td>
<td>HIGH SATISFACTION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Speed of agreed follow up actions
- Ease of getting hold of broker
- Ease of accessing other staff to help with queries
- Ability to translate company’s needs into action plan
- Broker’s understanding of training and development needs
- Ability to identify potential funding to support training
- Expertise and knowledge of broker
- Ability to explain various accreditations & qualifications
- Impartiality of advice
- Knowledge of training solutions within TTG

Average importance score = 8.7
Average satisfaction score = 8.3

SAMPLE BASE: 1284 (ALL RESPONDENT EMPLOYERS)
This presentation of average scores for importance and satisfaction for each of the eleven assessment criteria indicates a number of key findings:

- Scores for both satisfaction and importance are, for all criteria, relatively high on the 1 to 10 assessment scale provided, barely falling below 8 for any measure.

- Scores are thus closely grouped – there is only modest relative differentiation between the importance and performance scores against each assessment criteria, with most averages falling between 8 and 9.

- For most measures the average importance score is higher than the average satisfaction score, and for only one measure, the impartiality of advice offered by brokers, does the average performance score exceed the average importance score.

- For one measure, the ability to translate an employer’s needs into an action plan, it appears that there is a small but significant shortfall between satisfaction with the service delivered, and the level of importance accorded to this aspect of the service – since it falls into the ‘high importance, low satisfaction’ quadrant of our chart, being well above the average in terms of the importance accorded to it, but below the average in terms of satisfaction with the service delivered.

- These measures have changed little between the first and second wave and the insights and conclusions made from the first wave’s measures hold true.

The points that should be reiterated are as follows:

- The factors which the LSC considers the most important about the Train to Gain service – those which it wishes to measure – are also thought to be important by employers accessing the service.

- There is little evidence that, on average, any of the service criteria are considered unimportant – though there is certainly a hierarchy which places the ability to identify potential funding to support training as relatively most important, and ease of accessing other staff to help with queries as relatively least important.

- Satisfaction scores are also relatively high, indicating that there is no measured aspect of the service about which employers have substantial misgivings. Levels of satisfaction reported remain consistently high and provide further evidence of the fundamental approval amongst employers of the approach being taken.

- Nevertheless, the fact that importance scores tend to exceed satisfaction scores suggests that employers expect more, either because a small number are not receiving the service they expect, or because the service has been oversold to them initially, and cannot, however good, quite live up to expectations.

**Ranking responses in order of importance and satisfaction**

Another way of presenting this data collectively is to look at the order in which respondents rank each measure both in terms of importance, and of satisfaction, relative to the other measures. We have already noted that the spread of average scores is not great, but nevertheless that even within a relatively tightly defined span of scores, there is a clear hierarchy.
In terms of importance, as Figure 8 shows, issues of broker knowledge remain pre-eminent. In the second wave of evaluation, broker understanding of the employer’s training and development needs has increased in relative importance and holds fifth place in the hierarchy. Astute interpretation of employer needs is an important quality for a broker and this takes fourth place.

The measures materialising from the second wave of evaluation supports the view that the broker’s role in bringing specialist knowledge to bear on the employer’s position is of great significance. The meaningful application of specialist knowledge is of particular importance. Other aspects of responsiveness and impartiality are of less concern. It adds further weight to the supposition that issues of staff training are of low strategic importance for most companies and that companies are appreciative of a service that allows an outside expert to determine their needs and offer solutions to issues which would otherwise not be high enough up the strategic agenda to get the necessary attention.

Figure 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brokers ability to identify potential funding to support training activities</td>
<td>9.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise and knowledge of the broker</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers knowledge of training solutions within T2G</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers ability to translate companies’ needs into action plan</td>
<td>8.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers understanding of training and development needs</td>
<td>8.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers ability to explain various types of accreditation and qualifications</td>
<td>8.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed of agreed follow up actions</td>
<td>8.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to signpost to a range of providers</td>
<td>8.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of getting hold of broker</td>
<td>8.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impartiality of advice</td>
<td>8.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of accessing other staff to help with queries</td>
<td>7.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8, meanwhile, illustrates the same hierarchy, but this time on the basis of how satisfied employers are with the service delivered by Train to Gain. As we have established, scores are generally a little lower than for importance, and it is also evident that the spread of average scores is narrower – respondents are less discriminating for satisfaction than they are for importance. In other words, employers find it easier to identify what they want than to assess what they get.

There continue to be some discrepancies between the relative positions in this league table for satisfaction, compared with that for importance. Whilst issues of knowledge are also highest rated for satisfaction, the broker’s ability to translate company needs into an action plan is lower down the performance hierarchy than one would hope for, given its level of importance to employers.
Setting Priorities for Improvement

In understanding the results we have from the first wave of this survey, we have also applied a more sophisticated set of algorithms which provide a ranked list of the eleven measures in order of their priority for improvement. Essentially this uses the average importance and satisfaction scores and applies an algorithm to determine which are in greatest need of improvement to impact on the overall satisfaction with the service. This is a technique which BMG has used successfully in similar contexts in other projects, and it is a discriminating and sensitive approach.

Thus, in rank order, where the highest is the aspect of the service most in need of improvement (raw scores are provided to indicate the degree of difference between rank positions – for example there is very little difference between the fifth, sixth and seventh ranked issues, but a bigger gap between the seventh and eighth):

- The ability of the broker to identify the potential funding to support training activities (priority score 4.09);
- The ability of the broker to translate the needs of the company into an action plan (2.29);
- The speed of agreed follow up actions (1.62);
- The expertise and knowledge of the broker (0.58);
- The broker’s understanding of training and development needs (0.24);
- The broker’s knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain (0.16);
The broker’s ability to signpost to a range of providers (0.09);
- The ease with which employers could get hold of their broker (-1.86);
- The ability of the broker to explain various types of accreditation and qualifications (-2.56);
- The ease with which employers could access other staff to help with their query (-2.71);
- The impartiality of advice offered (-4.45).

Clearly these calculations underline our interpretation from other ways of looking at these figures, indicating that the main shortfalls in delivery against importance occur in identification of funding support for training, the broker’s ability to develop a sound action plan, and the speed of follow up activity. If the service is to improve further, then we would suggest that it is these elements on which action for improvement needs to be concentrated. Many process issues need little or even no attention.

**Impartiality**

The first of the three evaluation themes assessed was broker impartiality, measured for importance and satisfaction against three factors:

- The broker’s understanding of your training and development needs;
- The impartiality of advice offered;
- The broker’s ability to signpost you to a range of providers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Criteria</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broker's understanding of your training and development needs</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impartiality of advice offered</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broker's ability to signpost you to a range of providers</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broker's understanding of your training and development needs</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
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<td>Broker's ability to signpost you to a range of providers</td>
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</table>
Figure 9

AVERAGE SCORES FOR IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION AGAINST MEASURES OF BROKER IMPARTIALITY (ALL RESPONDENTS)

- Brokers understanding of training and development needs: Importance 8.85, Satisfaction 8.38
- Impartiality of advice: Importance 8.38, Satisfaction 8.46
- Ability to signpost to a range of providers: Importance 8.52, Satisfaction 8.08

SAMPLE BASE = 1284

Figure 10

PROPORTION OF EMPLOYERS SCORING 8 OR MORE FOR IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION OF IMPARTIALITY MEASURES (ALL RESPONDENTS)

- Brokers understanding of training and development needs: Importance 86%, Satisfaction 75%
- Impartiality of advice: Importance 77%, Satisfaction 77%
- Ability to signpost to a range of providers: Importance 80%, Satisfaction 65%

SAMPLE BASE = 1284
Table 1, and Figures 9 to 11 above illustrate in more detail the responses from employers in relation to the three measures of impartiality. A number of points are apparent:

- Understanding by the broker of an employer’s training needs is significantly the most important of the three impartiality criteria – with more than half of respondent employers scoring it as 10 out of 10 in terms of importance, the highest average importance score, and the largest proportion of respondents scoring its importance as 8 or over.

- Of the three measures, it is this understanding by the broker of an employer’s training needs where satisfaction is furthest behind importance in terms of average score;

- There also appears to be some issue in relation to broker’s ability to signpost a range of providers, where a relatively low proportion (65%) are sufficiently satisfied to score 8 or more, and 5% of respondents sufficiently displeased to score this aspect of the service at 4 or below;

- Here, as with other measures, it is however important to note high levels of satisfaction with all measures, providing a strong base to build upon further.

The following figure provides a comparison of satisfaction levels between the first and second wave evaluations. It shows an increase in the second wave for all three measures, suggesting that some improvements have already been made or simply that the process is going more smoothly as time goes on.
Reasons for dissatisfaction

For each measure, where respondents offered a score of 4 or less in terms of satisfaction, a follow up question was asked, probing the reasons for that dissatisfaction.

In terms of understanding training and development needs, insufficient contact with the broker was the most frequently cited reason for dissatisfaction. Typical comments made in the second wave of the evaluation include:

"The broker did not know the industry too well."

"They didn’t always respond to what I said."

"The eligibility of the training constantly changes and is difficult to keep up-to-date with."

In terms of comments on the impartiality of the service, these seem to focus on the seeming lack of interest from the broker, contacts limited to broker’s own experience and lack of follow up. These tend to be more general comments, rather than directly related to the issue of impartiality.

"The skills broker did not keep the interview."

"She only talked about people she worked with."

"Never followed it through."
Amongst the comments provided to explain a lack of satisfaction about the ability of brokers to signpost to a range of providers, again the comments reflect a wider range of concerns than implied by the question. Most feel they were not signposted at all and some feel that the range of providers they were offered was too limited.

Throughout, several respondents report insufficient or a complete lack of contact with their broker.

**Responsiveness**

The second of the three evaluation themes assessed was broker responsiveness, which measured importance and satisfaction against a further three factors:

- The ease with which employers could get hold of their broker;
- The ease with which employers could access other staff to help with their query; and
- The speed of agreed follow up actions.

Table 2, and Figures 14, 15 and 16 below illustrate in detail the response of employers in assessing these measures. As has already been established, the ease of accessing other staff to help with queries is of least importance to employers – this may be viewed as a ‘process’ issue which they would expect brokers to handle for them, and being able to get hold of the broker themselves is more important. Encouragingly the proportion of respondent employers that rate the ease of getting hold of their broker highly is greater than the proportion that rate the ease of accessing other staff to help with queries highly. Employers are most likely to be dissatisfied with the speed of agreed follow up actions (7% give this aspect a score no higher than 4), which reflects comments already reported with regard to impartiality.

Compared with the first wave, satisfaction levels have increased in the second wave with regard to accessing the broker and other staff, but they are little changed with regard to the speed of follow up actions. The speed of follow up is also about keeping promises and providing a reliable service. The fact that brokers are under-performing to some extent in this area should be of concern when it comes to building confidence in the process.
### PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS SCORING THEIR PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION AGAINST THREE ‘RESPONSIVENESS’ CRITERIA, ON A SCORING SCALE OF 1 TO 10, WHERE 1 IS HIGHLY UNIMPORTANT OR HIGHLY DISSATISFIED AND 10 IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT OR HIGHLY SATISFIED, WITH AVERAGE SCORES PROVIDED

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Measurement Criteria</th>
<th>1 %</th>
<th>2 %</th>
<th>3 %</th>
<th>4 %</th>
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<th>6 %</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>0.6</td>
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Figure 13

Average scores for importance and satisfaction against measures of broker responsiveness (all respondents)

Sample base = 1284

Figure 14

Proportion of employers scoring 8 or more for importance and satisfaction of responsiveness measures (all respondents)

Sample base = 1284
The following figure provides a comparison of satisfaction levels between the first and second wave evaluations. It shows an increase in the second wave for all three measures, suggesting that some improvements have already been made or simply that the process is going more smoothly as time goes on.
Reasons for dissatisfaction

For each measure, where respondents offered a score of 4 or less in terms of satisfaction, a follow up question was asked, probing the reasons for that dissatisfaction.

In terms of explaining dissatisfaction with the ease of getting hold of the broker, the reasons are, as one would expect – either employers found their contact difficult to get hold of, or received no reply to telephone messages left.

Where employers were dissatisfied with the ease of accessing other staff, this tended to be due to lack of feedback/contact with the broker, not being provided with alternative contacts or other staff just not being able to help.

Dissatisfaction with the speed of follow up actions is due largely to an absence of feedback or follow up, and to a lesser extent, by a reaction that was too slow. General dissatisfaction with the follow up action itself and difficulties in getting hold of brokers are also a contributing factor.

Knowledge

The final of the three evaluation themes assessed is that of the knowledge of brokers, consisting of five elements:

- The expertise and knowledge of the broker;
- The ability of the broker to translate the needs of the company into an action plan;
- The broker’s knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain;
- The ability of the broker to identify the potential funding to support training activities;
- The ability of the broker to explain various types of accreditation and qualifications.
### PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS SCORING THEIR PERCEPTION OF IMPORTANCE AGAINST FIVE 'KNOWLEDGE' CRITERIA, ON A SCORING SCALE OF 1 TO 10, WHERE 1 IS HIGHLY UNIMPORTANT AND 10 IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT, WITH AVERAGE SCORES PROVIDED

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## PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS SCORING THEIR PERCEPTION OF SATISFACTION AGAINST FIVE 'KNOWLEDGE' CRITERIA, ON A SCORING SCALE OF 1 TO 10, WHERE 1 IS HIGHLY DISSATISFIED AND 10 IS HIGHLY SATISFIED, WITH AVERAGE SCORES PROVIDED

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<td>Ability to explain various types of accreditation and qualifications</td>
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<td>4.4</td>
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<td>22.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 17

AVERAGE SCORES FOR IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION AGAINST MEASURES OF BROKER KNOWLEDGE (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Sample Base = 1284

Figure 18

PROPORTION OF EMPLOYERS SCORING 8 OR MORE FOR IMPORTANCE AND SATISFACTION OF KNOWLEDGE MEASURES (ALL RESPONDENTS)

Sample Base = 1284
In terms of importance, employers rank these knowledge measures as the most important aspects of the service, with identification of funding, the expertise of the broker, and the knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain being the most important of all the measures. Reflecting the findings in the first wave there appears to be the largest gaps between importance and delivery for two key issues – the identification of funding to support training activity and translating corporate needs into an action plan. Logically, improvements here should have the greatest impact in the overall positive perception of the delivery of the Train to Gain service.

It should be borne in mind, however, that satisfaction levels are high and that dissatisfied respondents are very much in the minority. The following figure compares the proportions of respondents scoring each measure at 8 or above in the first and second waves of the evaluation. There are slight increases in three of the areas, including the expertise and knowledge of the broker, the broker’s ability to translate company’s needs into an action plan and broker’s knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain. There has been a slight decrease in satisfaction with regard to the broker’s ability to identify potential funding to support training activities and their ability to explain various types of accreditation and qualifications.
Reasons for dissatisfaction

For each measure, where respondents offered a score of 4 or less in terms of satisfaction, a follow up question was asked, probing the reasons for that dissatisfaction.

The obvious reason for dissatisfaction with the expertise and knowledge of the brokers is that it was lacking but a number of comments draw attention to what could be interpreted as a lack of interest more than, specifically, a lack of expertise and knowledge. (These comments are from both the first and second waves):

"The skills broker was selling a service not providing one."

"She gave us some basic information and ditched us. She did not even point us in the right direction, we had to do it all ourselves."

"She was not really interested in helping us I feel and at one stage we could not get hold of her because she had gone on holiday."

Concerns relating to progressing employer needs towards an action plan are most likely to revolve around the fact that there was no action plan set up. In some cases, an action plan was set up but was not specific to the company’s needs. Other comments reflect a lack of communication/contact and support.
“Only done one action plan; should have been six.”

“This has only translated my problems and hasn’t told me how to get over them.”

“Can’t access much of the training because we’re in the public sector.”

Dissatisfaction with brokers’ knowledge of training solutions within Train to Gain are mainly to do with a lack of solutions provided, lack of feedback or contact but also a lack of clarity or explanation of the information supplied.

“We were only given a booklet for information.”

“Very poor knowledge in the caring and nursing sector.”

“Never followed it through.”

The two main reasons for dissatisfaction with regard to brokers identifying potential funding to support training activity include: that there was no funding available and that there was no follow-up or feedback. Typical comments in the second wave include:

“Instead of telling me about funding, she gave my details out to local colleges.”

“None of the training is subsidised.”

“There seems to be a problem with the way they decide on what should be offered to you.”

Those who rated their satisfaction of their broker’s ability to explain accreditations and qualifications at a low level report the lack of any explanation, or at least a clear explanation and/or a lack of relevance to their business sector.

**Overall Satisfaction**

Overall satisfaction with the Train to Gain service appears to be high, with an average score on overall satisfaction of 8.30 – almost exactly the same as the average of the satisfaction scores for all 11 measures taken together (8.27). More than three-quarters of respondents (77%) scored the service overall between 8 and 10 out of 10, reflecting a slight increase between the first and second waves (75% and 77% respectively). A third (34%) gave it the highest score of 10. At the other end of the scale, just 5% scored it between 1 and 4, indicating overall dissatisfaction.

Those dissatisfied were again asked why, and the primary issues revolved around a lack of follow up or contact. Other issues include: A lack of financial support, being provided with incorrect information, not having specific business needs catered for, lack of knowledgeable advisers and a perception of the process being a waste of time and money.
6 Improving the Train to Gain Broker Service

All respondent employers were asked whether they had any suggestions for improving the Train to Gain skills broker service. Nearly three-quarters, 71%, offered no further comment, and thereafter, the most common groups of answers were as follows:

- Better communication links (71 responses);
- Make more funding available (54 responses);
- Provide a faster or more efficient service (39 responses*).
- More follow up support (37 responses);
- Be more specific to our business needs (30 responses*);
- Make employers more aware of what is available (23 responses);
- More knowledgeable/better trained brokers (22 responses);
- Provide more detailed information (20 responses).

* This issue has increased in relative significance since the first wave.

These issues tend to reflect the issues for concern raised by respondents in answers to earlier questions and underline perceived shortfalls in service delivery.

Clearly there are issues around the basic level of customer service provided by brokers and employers’ concerns highlight the need for more attention being paid by brokers to maintaining a reasonable level of contact with employers, for brokers to research their customers’ markets more thoroughly than they do already and for them to prioritise and more closely monitor follow up action.

There are likely to be improvements in communication and general customer service as the service beds in and brokers become more experienced and confident in their roles but, on the other hand, a poor level of service at broker level now may become the norm if these issues are not addressed.

Although employers are always going to request more funding for training activity, it is not a bottomless pit and a reasonable level of funding must be arrived at which strikes a balance between subsidising employers that need financial support in this area and encouraging employers to recognise the business benefits of spending on training and to work it into their corporate budgets and planning.
7 Annex

Regional Results

The merging of first and second waves of survey data and the increase in the number of contacts available for the second wave ensures that regional sub-samples are now, in most cases, large enough to provide a reliable indicator of how brokers are performing at a local level.

There are now only five regions for which the sample bases are below 100 (100 is the number at which sample distribution is normalised). These are Yorkshire and Humberside (10 cases), the South East (47), London (54), the East of England (75) and the East Midlands (89).

The average overall satisfaction with the Train to Gain broker service is, as reported above, 8.30 and amongst the four regions where sample bases exceed 100, the level of satisfaction is highest in the North West (8.58) and lowest in the North East (8.18). The range from lowest to highest is, therefore, very narrow.

Analysis by company size

A similar analysis can be undertaken on the basis of company size (based on the number of employees). This suggests that lower levels of satisfaction are present amongst smaller employers, but they do not increase significantly as company size increases. By size band (for those size bands where there is a reasonable sample size) average overall satisfaction scores are:

- 1-5 employees, 8.13 (on 161 cases);
- 6-10 employees, 8.13 (on 209 cases);
- 11-49 employees, 8.44 (on 560 cases);
- 50-199 employees, 8.24 (on 246 cases);
- 200-249 employees, 8.38 (on 26 cases);
- 250+ employees, 8.27 (on 75 cases).

A target for satisfaction

The LSC wishes to agree targets for service user satisfaction measured as the proportion of respondents surveyed whose satisfaction score is above a given level. In order to inform discussion on appropriate service targets, we provide the following table, which indicates the proportion of respondents whose satisfaction scores are more than or equal to 6, 7 and 8, for each of the 11 measures, and overall. Where proportions are already above a nominal figure of 90%, we have indicated these in red type.
As the report has already indicated, some measures appear to flag significant priorities for improvement, and it would seem rational to link any targeting regime to ensuring improvement, above all, in these priority areas, and varying the target level for each measure depending on priority and current position.

Clearly if the target is to be set purely on the overall satisfaction score, 90% is effectively achieved if satisfaction is defined as being a score of 6 or above. A stretching but achievable target should either raise the target percentage, or narrow the definition of satisfaction to a higher range of scores, or a combination of both.