Welcome to Train to Gain News, the new publication from the Learning and Skills Council.

This issue features a guest editorial by Skills Minister Phil Hope, a report on how Train to Gain’s Skills Brokers are helping employers get the training they need and details of how Train to Gain enabled a South West roofing company to broaden its skills base and boost its turnover.

**Editorial**
Skills Minister Phil Hope expresses his firm support for Train to Gain and explains why investment in skills and training by Government, employers and individuals is so vital.

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**Case study**
How Train to Gain helped a roofing company broaden its skills base, boost its turnover and increase its employees’ motivation and confidence.

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**Feature**
Train to Gain Skills Brokers help businesses to work out their skills needs and then source the most appropriate training for them. A year after the launch of the LSC’s flagship service, Train to Gain News looks at their progress.

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**News update**
The West Midlands has successfully integrated the LSC’s new service throughout the region.

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**Train to Gain in Perspective**
The Chairman of the recently-formed 157 Group explains why further education colleges have such an important role to play in helping to deliver Train to Gain.

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**Where can I find out more?**
A new Train to Gain DVD outlines how the LSC’s flagship new service works and describes the benefits it brings to individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole.

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Skills Minister Phil Hope expresses his firm support for Train to Gain and explains why investment in skills and training by Government, employers and individuals is so vital.

Welcome to the second issue of Train to Gain News. This new publication from the LSC brings you all the latest news about Train to Gain, the innovative service to help businesses get the training they need to succeed.

Increased investment in workforce development is essential in order to raise our economic competitiveness, productivity and capability for technological progress as well as to reduce levels of social exclusion. We need investment in skills and training by Government, employers and individuals.

Train to Gain provides employers with impartial advice and easy access to training by identifying the needs of employers and matching these to a choice of quality training providers. It helps to improve employers’ productivity and competitiveness by ensuring that employees have the right skills to do the best job. Meanwhile employees benefit by increasing their skills, which leads to better jobs and a better quality of life.

Train to Gain is already helping tens of thousands of employers to improve their performance whilst enabling employees to get the skills they need for progression. It marks a new way of working with employers and is designed to put their business and skills development needs first, by identifying clear and comprehensive training solutions.

Train to Gain gives businesses greater choice in, and control over, their training. Businesses have a very good idea about what will make them more competitive but the advice of Skills Brokers can transform their ideas into actions. The Skills Brokerage service is one of the key parts of Train to Gain and enables the employer to get good quality advice and guidance on what they need and the best way to get it. In a recent survey of employers the Brokers’ ability to identify potential funding to support training activities was the most important part of the service, followed by Broker knowledge and expertise.

A total of 95 per cent of employers using Train to Gain are small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Smaller companies have always had difficulties in training staff, principally because they cannot afford the loss of productivity while their staff are training. But by bringing training to the workplace the cost to small businesses is minimised. Not only that, but compensation is available for companies with fewer than 50 employees - as a contribution to the loss of production while their employees are training.

It is early days for Train to Gain but I am pleased with its good start. It has been well received by employers, with more than 88 per cent being satisfied with the service. The fact that Lord Leitch acknowledged Train to Gain’s achievements in his Review of Skills was a great boost to everyone who has worked so hard over the last few years to make sure that Train to Gain was designed, tested and introduced. It also shows that the basic idea of asking the customer was right.

Train to Gain’s focus in the future will depend on what the individual customer wants. The focus at the moment is Level 2. The Government provides free tuition for a first full NVQ Level 2 qualification and any Skills for Life needs. However I would like to see employers investing in their own Leadership and Management skills and in higher skills for employees, such as Apprenticeships, Level 3 qualifications, foundation degrees and higher education, to help make this country’s workforce world-class.

Phil Hope MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills

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Copyright 2007, Learning and Skills Council
"Train to Gain has been invaluable"

How Train to Gain helped a roofing company broaden its skills base, boost its turnover and increase its employees’ motivation and confidence.

Markus Micklewright and his brother Maurice launched their roofing and building business in 2003 with two employees, a van and several thousand pounds worth of tools.

Since then their company, Nightingale Roofing and Building Services, has gone from strength to strength. They now undertake roofing and associated building work throughout the South West, have 10 employees and recently moved to spacious new business premises in the village of Ipplepen, near Newton Abbot, Devon – complete with an office, warehouse, drawing room and workshop. Not only that, company turnover is expected to hit £1 million this year.

While Maurice, who has over 20 years’ roofing experience, takes charge of all site projects and on-site training, Markus, who worked within the food industry prior to coming into construction, is responsible for business development, risk management and training.

Markus firmly believes that training employees in as broad a range of skills as possible is the key to success – which is why he contacted Train to Gain last year for help and advice.

Train to Gain immediately put Markus in touch with Plymouth-based Skills Broker Janet Powell, who works for Business Link Devon and Cornwall.

"Our drive is to be the first choice roofing solutions provider in the South West," says Markus. "Our training needs are driven by the fact that our team needs to be as multi-skilled and versatile as possible. Rather than simply being slaters or tilers we wanted all our employees to be able to do things like lead work, metal roofing and cladding as well.

"I gave Janet the information about where we had come from and where we wanted to be and she went away and found out what training was available.

"Janet is a star. Nothing was too much trouble for her. She found suitable NVQ courses in single ply roofing, slating and tiling through the South Wales and South West Roofing Training Group in Exmouth and also tracked down supervisory skills training courses for our team leaders."

As well as taking NVQs several Nightingale employees took a Flag UK course in single ply membrane roofing and green roof installations - which helped the company win £400,000 worth of work it wouldn’t have got otherwise.

"Train to Gain has been invaluable," says Markus. "The advice and support that Janet has given us and the funding she has sourced have enabled us to deliver some excellent projects.

"We would not have the level of business we have now if we hadn’t put training first and attended the courses. Training is the starting point for success. The more skills you acquire, the better you get. Training has given our employees more skills, greater earning power, job security and job diversity. Our employees appreciate that we are investing in them and as a result they are committed, motivated and very loyal. They will all go that extra mile."

Janet is delighted that Markus and Maurice are so committed to training.

"It’s a very vibrant company which is growing and developing," she says. "They firmly believe in investing in their staff and are looking to do more training in the future too."

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"Skills Brokers are making good progress"

Train to Gain Skills Brokers help businesses to work out their skills needs and then source the most appropriate training for them. A year after the launch of the LSC’s flagship service, Train to Gain News looks at their progress.

Skills Brokers are right at the very heart of Train to Gain.

There are currently 350 Train to Gain Skills Brokers working with businesses across England. They identify employers’ skills needs, pinpoint the types of training available and find the best way of funding it.

David Greer, the LSC’s Skills Director, Support to Business, is delighted that 89 per cent of employers have expressed satisfaction with the quality of the help and support they receive and believes Skills Brokers are doing an excellent job.

“I am very pleased, but more importantly the customers are very pleased,” says David, who led the LSC’s successful delivery of the Employer Training Pilots, the precursor to Train to Gain. He is responsible for the LSC’s Support to Business programmes, including Train to Gain, Investors in People and the Leadership and Management Programme.

A year after the launch of Train to Gain, David believes there are a host of reasons why employers are so impressed by the Skills Brokerage element of the service.

“Busy managers don’t necessarily have the time to step back and think about areas where particular skills issues are hampering the progress of the business,” he says. “With Train to Gain you get an independent and impartial skills expert to come along and help you with those issues, identify what the solutions might be, find those solutions, some of which will be subsidised, some of which won’t, and then work with you to evaluate the business benefits of that training.”

The Skills Brokers working across the LSC’s nine regions really understand the nuts and bolts of business. Many have run businesses themselves while others have years of experience in workforce development. The LSC has also led the development of a new set of competency standards for Skills Brokers and is working with the Chartered Management Institute to “professionalise the whole area of business advice and support.”

With a vast amount of skills and business expertise at their fingertips, Skills Brokers are well-equipped to offer guidance and support on training at all levels. Although Train to Gain’s current focus is on Level 2 qualifications and Skills for Life, Skills Brokers also advise on a wide range of skills needs, including Apprenticeships, Level 3 qualifications, higher education and Leadership and Management training.

Continues...
Skills Broker Fay Cannings has been involved in Train to Gain right from the start and prides herself on her extensive knowledge of skills and training. Fay works for Reed in Partnership as part of the London Brokerage Consortium – one of the three Skills Brokerage contractors appointed by Train to Gain in the London region. She has advised more than 170 businesses about their skills needs in the past year and also gives guidance and support on many other business issues, including Investors in People, Leadership and Management training and other business support networks.

Fay works across a wide range of sectors but has also built up a specialised knowledge of the construction and the audio-visual industries. She stays up to date with new initiatives by keeping in regular contact with training providers, attending networking events and consulting training websites.

“Liaising with the providers is fundamental to the Skills Broker’s role because when you speak to a client you have to find out what training is available and whether it’s feasible,” says Fay, who appears in the new Train to Gain DVD and also took part in the national launch.

“I feel a huge sense of satisfaction from visiting businesses, helping them to work out what their skills needs are and then going back six months later to see the impact training has had. You can see that people really welcome someone coming to talk to them about their business, especially smaller companies which don’t have the time to think about training on a day to day basis.

“We focus on finding out what the key things are for the business. More often than not it’s training but there are other areas we look at as well. It’s very important for people to understand Train to Gain in its entirety. Obviously there is a focus on Level 2 NVQs but from my point of view it’s a much more holistic service and really invaluable in terms of employers putting aside time to think about their business and where it is going.”

David agrees that while the emphasis on Level 2 qualifications is key, Train to Gain has a lot more to offer employers besides.

“A first full Level 2 qualification is the fundamental platform for sustainable employment and business productivity,” he explains. “That’s the core of Train to Gain and it’s critical. But it’s important to remember that Train to Gain is about the whole range of business skills needs too. What we are seeking to achieve is an integrated service, a wrap-around service.”

There’s no doubt that Train to Gain has had a very successful first year but now David and his team are busy looking to the future.

“Skills Brokers are making good progress considering that it’s the very early days of a national service,” he says. “But there are three areas we need to focus on. One is expanding the Brokerage service to support the growth of Train to Gain next year – and managing that expansion so that quality is maintained.

“Secondly, we want to focus on the relationship of the Brokers with training providers and colleges. They need to get closer together, trust one another better and rely on one another more.”

“The third thing is to work on Skills Brokers helping businesses to evaluate the benefits of training so they become more likely to invest independently in training themselves. The ultimate objective is to get employers to be more confident, better-informed purchasers of training so that the Skills Brokers can then step back and move on to the next company needing help.”

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The West Midlands has successfully integrated the LSC’s new service throughout the region.

As Train to Gain celebrates its first anniversary this month (April), it’s clear that the service is making a real difference to businesses across the LSC’s nine regions.

Many of the regional Train to Gain teams have also been praised for their success in engaging employers and employees and for the highly-effective ways in which they are delivering and managing the service.

‘Merryhill Waterfront, from where the new Train to Gain service will be delivered’

The West Midlands, a region spanning Birmingham and Solihull, the Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire and Staffordshire, is one of them.

The regional Train to Gain team has not only managed to integrate the service particularly well in the region but it has established excellent channels of communication throughout its five geographical areas.

Continues...
One year on (continued)

“We are pleased with the progress that we’re making,” says Stephen Lilley, the region’s Train to Gain Director.  “As with all these things, there are areas for improvement but we are pleased with our performance so far. More than 5,000 employers and more than 15,000 employees have been supported through the service in the last year and as new training providers come on-stream we would expect to see a sharp increase in those numbers.”

Although each region focuses on sectors relevant to its regional skills needs, Train to Gain in the West Midlands has “good coverage” across a wide range of sectors, including manufacturing, public services and business and professional services. Not only that, the region has helped businesses source an impressively broad range of training, from Level 2 and Skills for Life through to Leadership and Management training and higher education.

The West Midlands Train to Gain team has worked very hard to ensure that the Train to Gain message permeates through everything it does. The region has around 40 Skills Brokers, all of whom work through the newly-formed West Midlands Brokerage Service, and 200 separate training providers.

“I think where we are particularly strong is the way in which we work as a region with our area partnership teams,” explains Stephen, who joined the LSC five years ago. “From the very start the region saw Train to Gain as part of the totality of the delivery we expect training providers to offer - rather than as a separate programme or funding stream.”

Monthly area meetings are held by the LSC for Skills Brokers and training providers. They are chaired by the appropriate Area Director.

“Everybody in the region has fully bought into Train to Gain and is involved in overseeing and managing the programme’s delivery,” says Stephen.

“Within the regional Train to Gain team we have a manager and a support adviser attached to each of the five area offices. The concept of having a Train to Gain manager in each of the area offices is that they provide ongoing expertise, staff development and support so they can build up the knowledge and experience of staff across the organisation.”

This approach has worked so well that the West Midlands team has shared it with other LSC regions, some of whom are looking at using the same model.

“We think this is the best way of getting Train to Gain properly integrated,” says Stephen.

“We aren’t complacent but we do think we have established a very strong foundation in terms of moving forward and that Train to Gain has the potential to be a very successful service in the region.”

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The Chairman of the recently-formed 157 Group explains why further education colleges have such an important role to play in helping to deliver Train to Gain.

"I firmly believe that further education colleges should be at the heart of economic development for their localities and that they should be the first port of call for inwardly-investing companies. As well as being Chairman of the 157 Group I am the principal of Warwickshire College, a beacon college for employer engagement. We have our own Train to Gain contract and we are finding that many companies are becoming very reliant on us to provide training to take them through their development cycle over the next five years.

"The further education sector is responding well to Train to Gain and we are generally very positive about it.

"I have total confidence in further education colleges and think that those which focus on being responsive in the training they do with businesses will do very well. There seems to be a lot of good will amongst companies for the training offered by further education colleges.

"We believe that we deliver an excellent training service to our employers and working in partnership with the brokerage service can support many more companies, especially those that haven’t found it easy to up-skill their staff.

"The 157 Group was named after paragraph 157 of the Foster review of further education colleges, which called for larger colleges to have more of a voice nationally. We formed in July 2006 and have 22 colleges in membership at the moment. The criteria for membership are that colleges must have a turnover of at least £35 million and also have had at least a Grade 1 or 2 for Leadership and Management at their last inspection."

Ioan Morgan
Chairman of the 157 Group
Principal of Warwickshire College

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Train to Gain - The Movie

A new Train to Gain DVD outlines how the LSC’s flagship new service works and describes the benefits it brings to individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole.

Train to Gain has got off to a great start, with employers, training providers, Skills Brokers and stakeholders all testifying to the huge difference it is making to businesses and employees alike.

Many of them appear in a new Train to Gain DVD, which will be distributed to Skills Brokers, regional LSC offices and key stakeholders. The five-minute film outlines how the LSC’s new service works and describes the benefits it brings to individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole.

The DVD, which features Education and Skills Secretary Alan Johnson and Skills Minister Phil Hope, is introduced by Olympic gold medallist and transatlantic rower James Cracknell.

“As a gold medallist and world champion I understand the importance of training,” says James. “Whether it’s for sport or business, the principles for achieving world class peak performance are the same – identifying areas for improvement, training in those areas and then enjoying the results of your hard work.”

Skills Broker Fay Cannings, from the London Brokerage Consortium, outlines how Skills Brokers assess employers’ training needs while employees from two businesses which have used Train to Gain to address their skills needs describe the impact training has had on them.

Jennifer Allen, Account Manager for The Hardy Group, a South London business offering print services, contract publishing and media sales to clients across the UK, went on a project management course while her colleague, Creative Director Oliver Schneider, did a marketing training course. Meanwhile Mark Yates, Company Secretary of Kershaws Garden Centre in Brighouse, West Yorkshire, explains how Train to Gain offered two of his employees the opportunity to do an NVQ Level 2 in Customer Service and gave them the skills to do their jobs even better.

To order a copy of the DVD, please email Granby Marketing (lsc@granbymsl.co.uk) with your request quoting reference number: LSC-P-NAT-060537

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