Welcome to Train to Gain News

This issue features an editorial by Glenn Robinson, Train to Gain’s Development Director, details of the action and investment planned for Train to Gain in 2008 and a report on the first training providers in the country to achieve a new accreditation for excellence.

**Editorial**

Train to Gain Development Director Glenn Robinson explains how new enhancements to the service will enable training providers to work with skills brokers more easily and effectively.

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**Case Study**

Training provider Leicester College delivers training to businesses around the clock – even on Christmas Day.

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**Feature**

Train to Gain: A Plan for Growth outlines the key role Train to Gain will play in transforming the nation’s skills base, productivity and competitiveness.

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**Training providers – Special Feature**

A team of London training providers describe how they are helping to develop skills at all levels through Train to Gain.

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**News Updates**

Details of the first training providers to achieve a new mark of quality and how Train to Gain is helping a growing number of small business leaders and managers to develop their leadership skills.

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There’s no doubt that 2008 is going to be a very exciting year for Train to Gain. This Learning and Skills Council (LSC) service has made an excellent start since its launch in 2006 but we are confident that it will be even better this year. We will not only be enhancing the service but also putting in huge amounts of investment and adding some new flexibilities to the offer to employers.

The actions and investment planned for 2008 are set out in Train to Gain: A Plan for Growth, which was launched in November last year (2007). We have acknowledged that there were some teething troubles during the first year of Train to Gain but as the plan makes clear, we are addressing them and are confident that the changes made will enable a lot more employers to engage with the service.

As well as focusing on the findings of A Plan for Growth, this issue of Train to Gain News looks at the crucial relationship between skills brokers and the 700-plus training providers.

Some providers have criticised Train to Gain but I believe the following changes we are introducing will address most of their concerns. We are reducing bureaucracy for providers by simplifying the way in which they obtain the employer-data required to enrol learners. We are also standardising the way in which skills brokers supply information to providers about employers, making it clearer, better quality and easier to understand. In the future, the LSC regions will specify in their planning which employers skills brokers are targeting and make it clearer to providers which employers they may target. We have also reviewed the way skills brokerage operates in all nine regions in order to make the service more consistent and enable providers to work with skills brokers more easily and effectively.

Many training providers have been very successful at delivering Train to Gain and we will be showcasing them during the course of the year. It is important to emphasise that as Train to Gain grows there are huge opportunities for more providers to get involved and for existing providers to significantly increase their Train to Gain activity.

As many of you will have seen, the second phase of the Train to Gain marketing campaign started earlier this month (January) and is already generating a lot of interest. Our eye-catching TV and radio advertisements have been very successful and we will also be moving to more regional specific campaigns focusing on particular sectors.

There is clearly a lot of hard work ahead this year but at this stage we’d like to say a big thank you to everyone involved in the delivery of Train to Gain so far – partners, stakeholders, skills brokers, training providers and employers. We look forward to another successful year working with you.

Glenn Robinson
Development Director
Train to Gain
Learning and Skills Council

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Leicester College prides itself on providing high-quality training specifically tailored to employers’ skills needs.

The eighth largest further education college in the country, it has Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status for Print Skills, Retail, Construction and Enterprise and set up S4B, its own specialist business “one-stop shop,” in 2003. S4B is now an approved training provider for Train to Gain and offers its services to businesses across a wide range of sectors, from Health and Social Care to Construction.

The college has formed effective relationships with 11 other Train to Gain partners, including Waste Management Assessment Services and Construction and Training Services, so even if S4B can’t offer the specialised training employers are looking for, they are able to bring in other providers who can.

“We feel Train to Gain is going very well,” says Helen Keighley, Head of Employer Engagement at Leicester College. “Virtually all our training is done in the workplace and always at a time that is appropriate and convenient for the employer. Within the care industry we are often at residential care homes at 10pm, training night staff who want to work towards an NVQ. We have even done English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training in a care home on Christmas Day. It’s a question of doing what the employer needs.”

Last year the college worked with around 280 employers through Train to Gain, including Leicester City Council, Argos and Samworth Brothers, the food manufacturing group.

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It provided training to a total of 1,403 employees, exceeding its target of 1,345. Most learners achieved Level 2 qualifications (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A* to C) but others developed their skills through Level 3 (equivalent to two A level passes) courses and Leadership and Management training.

Leicester College works closely with Train to Gain skills brokers in the East Midlands. It also has its own team of five training consultants who specialise in particular sectors, such as Retail and Health and Social Care, and help to identify training solutions for employers.

The college is currently helping a group of around 50 Leicester taxi drivers to work towards an NVQ Level 2 qualification to improve their skills. Initiated by Leicester Shire Promotions, responsible for promoting Leicester and the surrounding area to visitors, and funded through Train to Gain, the project has proved a huge success so far.

"Leicester Shire Promotions wanted to improve the quality of taxi services in the city and so we have worked out a programme which includes customer service, personal safety and disability awareness," explains Helen. "It is going down fantastically and the drivers’ attendance is fabulous. They do their training in the evening after their shifts and there is a lot of excitement about it."

Judging by the feedback Helen and her team have received so far, employers and learners alike have been highly impressed with the training they have accessed through Train to Gain.

“One employer did Leadership and Management training and told us that the ideas that came out of it contributed to cost savings within the business,” says Helen. “It was a large company and they were extremely pleased with the impact the training had had.”

“Other employers have made comments like ‘they were very responsive to our needs’ and ‘their advice was positive and offered everything I was looking for.’ We also held a presentation evening for our care employees recently and it was brilliant to see their excitement at having achieved their qualifications. Many of them were mature learners who hadn’t been particularly successful at school and they were saying ‘we didn’t realise we could do it.’ It was all so rewarding.”

The forthcoming year looks set to be a very busy one for Leicester College. The team is looking forward to working with more employers and has submitted a bid to deliver training to the self-employed and the voluntary sector through Train to Gain. It also hopes to be inspected for the new standard, the new accreditation for training providers, by the end of June.
The expansion of Train to Gain will help employers identify and meet skills needs at all levels.

As the New Year gets into its stride, Train to Gain is undergoing a massive and very exciting expansion.

Since Train to Gain was launched in 2006, it has helped more than 52,000 employers to improve the skills of their workforce and enabled over 240,000 employees to undertake training. Now funding has been doubled and the service is being developed further – to offer bespoke skills brokerage and source high-quality training to help all employers identify and meet their skills needs.

Train to Gain: A Plan for Growth was launched by Innovation, Universities and Skills Secretary John Denham and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Chairman Chris Banks on 26th November last year (2007). A Plan for Growth sets out how more than £1 billion – around a third of the adult skills and further education budget – will be routed through Train to Gain by July 2011 and states that the service “will play a key part in transforming the nation’s skills base, productivity and competitiveness in the period to 2020.” As well as the provision of more funding for a broader range of skills, the plan’s key elements include the lifting of the funding cap for the best training providers, an increase to £30 million a year for small to medium-sized enterprises’ (SMEs).

Leadership and Management training, an expansion of the LSC’s National Employer Service and the setting-up of a new compact with Sector Skills Councils to ensure Train to Gain meets the skills needs of employers in all sectors. Working closely with Jobcentre Plus through their Local Employment Partnerships, Train to Gain will also support people who have been unemployed to continue their training once they are back in work.

“Train to Gain’s achievements in the first year have been good and with the planned expansion, we wanted to learn from that experience to develop the strategy set out in A Plan for Growth,” says Clare Pierce, Train to Gain’s Programme Director.

The strategy for growth outlined in the plan covers four distinct areas. These comprise the new offer to employers, building a stronger network of Train to Gain providers, an intensified approach to lifting performance and ensuring consistency across the LSC and clearer communication about Train to Gain and the way in which it enables all employers, whatever their size, to address skills needs at all levels.

Train to Gain is also being extended to include the self-employed and the voluntary sector and in specified circumstances there may be funding for people doing a second Level 2 or Level 3 programme.

The plan seeks to enhance the effectiveness of skills brokers too, and Glenn Robinson, Train to Gain’s Development Director, explains more about this in his editorial article.

In the weeks since it was published, A Plan for Growth has been very well received and work on putting it into action is already underway.

“The response has been very positive,” says Clare Pierce. “Partners and stakeholders have said that the plan is clear and sets out what needs to be achieved. This is important as A Plan for Growth is very much about a joint effort, with actions for the LSC and its partners and stakeholders.”

The LSC is working closely with organisations like the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to promote the Skills Pledge and encourage more employers to use Train to Gain to develop employees’ skills.

A Plan for Growth can be read in full at traintogain.gov.uk
A week in the life of a training provider

Curriculum Manager Trevor Hunter’s week is a hectic one – whether he’s talking to employers about their specific skills needs or discussing learners’ progress with assessors and internal verifiers.

Trevor Hunter is the Curriculum Manager of the Department of Applied Optics at City and Islington College in London. He is also Employer Liaison Manager at the college’s Centre for Applied Sciences, which covers optics, forensics, sports science and allied medical sciences. A former optician, Trevor, 56, ran his own practices in the UK and Spain before returning to lecturing in 2003. From September 2008 he will be helping to deliver the new BTEC National Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing to an international cohort of students in Beijing.

City and Islington College has recently been awarded the Queen’s Anniversary Prize for “creating pathways to employment and higher education in the sciences” and Principal Frank McLoughlin and Director of Centre Derek Puddick will receive the honour from the Queen at Buckingham Palace next month (February).

The citation for the award says that the college “offers one of the widest selections of innovative science courses of any college of further education.”

Monday: I generally have a teaching commitment for about one or two hours a day and the rest of the time I manage the department. In terms of Train to Gain the college is the only provider of NVQ Level 2s in Optical Retailing and Optical Manufacturing in the UK so I spend a lot of time talking to employers about their skills needs and how to meet them.

We are currently delivering training to 40 employees through Train to Gain – some from T H Collison, a small multiple group of opticians, and others from the Norville Group in Gloucester. Today I held my weekly meeting with the NVQ assessors and internal verifiers to discuss learners’ progress and where they have got to in their modules.

Tuesday: I went out and did an induction with two or three prospective employees in an optician’s practice. This involved going through the mechanics of the course, checking their Skills for Life needs, looking at the Train to Gain paperwork with the employer and employees and doing a skills scan. We work closely with skills brokers and some of our leads for training come through them. We also generate a lot of our own leads because optics is such a specialised industry.

Wednesday: A team from Specsavers Opticians came into the college to talk to students about job prospects in the optics industry. I’m constantly meeting people from the industry – it is so important to get feedback from employers about their needs and how students are going to meet those needs.

Thursday: I had a meeting with the Professional Training Manager of Vision Express to discuss all modes of training, including Train to Gain, for Optical Manufacturing and Optical Retailing.

Friday: The Centre for Applied Sciences has a weekly management meeting, with both employer engagement and Train to Gain always on the agenda. One of the most exciting things about Train to Gain is that many employers don’t put money aside for training and the service provides them with the opportunity to invest in their staff and help them achieve a recognised qualification. I find my role very rewarding – particularly the collaborative partnership established between the employer, the provider and the individual. We pride ourselves on delivering high-quality professional development. Everyone benefits when the employer and the provider work together to support the individual. Very often the learners say that the training has motivated them and given them ambition to progress, perhaps to a Level 3 qualification or to qualify as a registered optician.

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“It is very rewarding to guide and support employers and their staff as they undertake their learning journey”

Training providers are playing an important role in helping to develop skills at all levels through Train to Gain.

City and Islington College, London

Teresa Esan has been Head of Workforce Development and Regeneration at London’s City and Islington College since 2003. The college has Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status for ICT and Network Technologies and Child Care and Early Years Education. It manages a consortium of five providers and has delivered training to 200 employers through Train to Gain so far – from Skills for Life, Literacy and Numeracy to full Level 2 and Level 3 programmes (on the women’s only pilot). The college also provides a range of Foundation Degrees. Train to Gain News asked Teresa how training providers help to develop skills at all levels.

Why is Train to Gain such an important service?
Training is only effective if the skills acquired directly impact on business performance. Train to Gain represents a new way of working with businesses that allows training to be tailored to do just that. City and Islington College delivers a variety of qualifications through Train to Gain to help employers bridge the skills gaps in their organisation. This has a knock-on effect in supporting the local economy and ensuring that local businesses thrive in an increasingly competitive market.

How do training providers help to deliver Train to Gain?
Providers like City and Islington College engage with employers, either directly or through referrals from skills brokers, to identify appropriate training solutions to meet businesses’ needs. Through detailed information, advice and guidance sessions we are able, for each employee, to recommend the appropriate training and the most appropriate funding stream they can access. We deliver training through four vocational centres within the college and have a focused employer engagement strategy, which includes the delivery of Train to Gain.

How do training providers work with skills brokers?
Training providers are working much more closely with skills brokers. Through joint visits, providers can observe skills brokers carrying out their Organisational Needs Analysis and we as the provider conduct a Training Needs Analysis. Both work hand in hand to address business and learner needs.

What have employers said to you about Train to Gain?
In a recent survey of our Train to Gain employers, 88 per cent said they would recommend our training to others due to the high standard of training. An employer whose staff are trained by City and Islington College said: “The college offers a flexible package. We have bus drivers who work unusual shifts and the college has worked out a programme which fits around their shifts. It means that our workers who would not normally be able to receive training can – and they are really enjoying it.”

What are the most rewarding aspects of a training provider’s role?
The best part is seeing providers, employers, skills brokers and adult learners all working proactively together, addressing the national skills agenda on a local level. In a survey of our Train to Gain learners, 96 per cent indicated that the training they had undertaken impacted positively on their performance at work. It is very rewarding to guide and support employers and their staff as they undertake their learning journey and to see the distance they have travelled. Many are learners who have been working for years but left school with no qualifications. Through encouragement and support they are able to pass Skills for Life tests and achieve vocational qualifications. Training provides learners with confidence – this is acknowledged by employers who see that they are willing to take on more responsibility and apply their skills in their day-to-day work.

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New mark of quality highlights excellence

The LSC and Campaign for Excellence recognise the training providers who have achieved the new standard.

The new standard will boost the quality of training provision while encouraging employers to invest in developing the skills of their workforce.

The first training providers in the country to achieve a new accreditation for excellence have been recognised for their success.

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The new standard is backed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and has been developed with the intention of bringing about a “transformation” in the delivery of high-quality training and development. It measures and recognises training provider excellence in two key areas – responsiveness to employer needs and in a particular vocational area.

A fundamental aspect of the new standard is that unlike previous accreditation schemes it is open to any type of training provider – including higher education institutions, employers and commercial providers as well as colleges and Work Based Learning providers. Accreditation is verified by employers themselves too, which means that the criteria for achieving the standard reflects their specific needs.

One of the first training providers to achieve the new mark of quality was City of Sunderland College. A member of the 157 Group, it has an annual turnover of more than £40 million and has Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status for Computer Networking, Contact Centres and Building Services. It delivers training across a wide range of sectors, including Care, Hospitality, Engineering, Construction, Retail and Management, and has so far worked with nearly 100 employers through Train to Gain.

“The college is delighted to have achieved the new standard – especially knowing that the robust external assessment process was validated by our employers,” said Lesley Griffin, Director of Employer Engagement at City of Sunderland College.

“One of the key benefits for us is that it gave us an opportunity to review our approaches, delivery and results and to have them rigorously reviewed externally.”

“The new standard should help employers to easily recognise which training providers are fully responsive to their needs in providing them with business solutions.”

The LSC held an event in London before Christmas, chaired by Chris Humphries, Chief Executive of the new Commission for Employment and Skills, to honour the first 22 providers, including City of Sunderland College, to achieve the new standard.

Congratulating them on their success, Jaine Clarke, the LSC’s Director of Skills for Employers, said: “The new standard will bring numerous benefits to employers and providers.”

“It will help providers to respond to employers’ needs and boost the quality of training provision while encouraging employers to invest in training their staff.”

“I hope other training providers across the country will follow suit and work towards achieving the new standard.”

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Training boost for small business managers

The expansion of Train to Gain will enable 60,000 managers to access Leadership and Management training over the next three years.

Train to Gain is helping a growing number of senior small business leaders and managers to develop their leadership skills and enable their businesses to grow and flourish.

The expansion of Train to Gain was announced by Innovation, Universities and Skills Secretary John Denham and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Chairman Chris Banks in Train to Gain: A Plan for Growth in November last year (2007). Details are outlined in this issue of Train to Gain News and include a massive boost for management training in small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This means that over the next three years the service will fund Leadership and Management training in over 42,000 companies across the country.

If you are a Managing Director, Owner, Director or Senior Manager with direct responsibility for the leadership and development of your business, you could receive up to £1,000 of funded Leadership and Management training.

A Leadership and Management Specialist will arrange to visit your company at a time that fits into your busy work schedule. The Specialist will carry out a free and impartial Business Review, see if you are eligible for funding, help to develop a Personal Action Plan that is appropriate and convenient and find appropriate training courses. These range from formal training, where managers work towards specific qualifications, to informal training, such as coaching and mentoring.

To find out more, visit traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 015 55 45 to arrange for a skills broker to contact you.

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