Train to Gain News is a brand-new publication from the Learning and Skills Council. It will bring you all the latest information about Train to Gain, the new service designed to help employers get the training they need to succeed.

**Editorial**

Chris Banks, Chair of the LSC, welcomes readers to the first issue of Train to Gain News and explains why the service has such a vital role to play in developing a skilled, dedicated workforce.

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**Features**

David Way, Jaine Clarke, David Greer, Glenn Robinson and Karen Woodward outline the development and thinking behind the new service.

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**Case study**

How Train to Gain helped a garden centre boost its employees' motivation and confidence and gave them the skills to do their jobs even better.

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**News update**

New figures show more and more employers think training is the key to success.

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**Employer testimonial**

Small Business Council member Sean Taggart explains why Train to Gain is such a crucial service for small businesses.

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**Where can I find out more?**

The Learning and Skills Council has produced a useful leaflet outlining the business benefits of Train to Gain and how you and your business can get involved.

[Click here to read more](#)
Welcome to the first issue of Train to Gain News. This regular new publication from the Learning and Skills Council will bring you all the latest news about the highly-successful Train to Gain service – from interviews with employers who have experienced the business benefits of Train to Gain at first hand to examples of best practice across the nine regions.

We will explore Train to Gain’s many strengths in forthcoming issues of Train to Gain News. Employers, training providers, Skills Brokers and stakeholders will testify that the service offers independent and practical advice on training at all levels, for example Apprenticeships, and also gives employees the opportunity to gain high-quality education and skills.

We are delighted that Train to Gain has got off to such a positive start. Demand is high, with over 22,000 employers now using the service to address their skills needs and boost business performance, and more than 88 per cent expressing satisfaction with the expert help and support they have received. A major advertising campaign is currently underway in national and regional newspapers, national and local radio and the trade press to further raise employers’ awareness of Train to Gain.

Lord Leitch acknowledged Train to Gain’s achievements in his recent report on the UK’s long-term skills needs. He highlighted the fact that the Further Education system will be central to equipping the workforce with the skills to make the country competitive and recognised Train to Gain’s important contribution to the challenge ahead.

I firmly believe that Train to Gain has a vital role to play in helping to develop a skilled and dedicated workforce, both now and in the years to come.

As David Way, the LSC’s Director of Skills, says in this edition of Train to Gain News: “We’re confident that we’ve built a robust service that is here to stay.” I wholeheartedly endorse his words.

In this issue we profile some of the key members of the LSC’s Train to Gain policy team – all of whom have worked enthusiastically to develop and implement the service. Jaine Clarke, Director of Skills for Employers, outlines how the LSC built the Skills Brokerage service employers really wanted while David Greer, Skills Director, Support to Business, describes how Train to Gain is carefully monitored to make sure that it’s on target and working consistently. Meanwhile Sean Taggart, Group Managing Director of the Albatross Travel Group and a member of the Small Business Council, tells us of his support for the unique service Train to Gain offers.

I hope you will all find Train to Gain News an inspiring and informative read. There’s clearly a lot to do to tackle skills shortages across the country but we are confident that Train to Gain is starting to make a real difference. Whether you’re an employer or a training provider, a Skills Broker or a stakeholder, thank you for all your hard work, commitment and support.

Christopher N Banks CBE
Chair
Learning and Skills Council
“Employers are at the heart of Train to Gain”

How the LSC built the Skills Brokerage service employers really wanted.

When it came to developing the highly-praised Train to Gain service, the LSC listened to employers every step of the way. The process started in 2003 with the publication of the first Skills White Paper, 21st Century Skills, which emphasised the need for employers to have a skilled workforce and for employees to be able to gain high-quality education and training.

The Employer Training Pilots, offering subsidised training to small and medium-sized enterprises to help them develop their workforce, were launched at the same time. These were later superseded by the National Employer Training Programme, which in turn became Train to Gain in 2006.

“The purpose of the pilots was always to test out what worked in terms of achieving the dual objectives of improving the qualifications and skills of individuals and in turn having a positive impact on business performance and productivity,” explains Jaine Clarke, the LSC’s Director of Skills for Employers. Jaine is responsible for skills policy development for employers, which includes leading the development and implementation of Train to Gain.

“The four-year period that the pilots covered was a really good opportunity for us to test out what worked and what didn’t. But it’s important to point out that Train to Gain isn’t just an extension of the pilots. It has taken the best from that experience to build a much broader offer of a comprehensive new service for the employer.”

Employers were involved in the development of Train to Gain right from the outset.

“We had a constant two-way dialogue with employers,” says Jaine, who joined the LSC’s national office two years ago.

“Every employer who took part in the Employer Training Pilots was indirectly involved in helping us to design Train to Gain. We listened very clearly to what they told us, looked at what they valued and built it in.

“The independent and impartial Skills Brokerage service is a really good example of the dialogue we had. Employers told us that they valued an adviser working for them with their best interests at heart – someone who wasn’t there to promote or sell a particular product or service but to help them address their business needs and look at how skills could benefit them. That’s at the very heart of the Train to Gain service as a result.”

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As well as talking to employers, the LSC team worked closely with colleagues at Business Link, the Regional Development Agencies and the Small Business Council. They also talked to partners from the Department of Trade and Industry, Department for Education and Skills, Association of Colleges, Investors in People UK, Sector Skills Councils and other key stakeholders.

Six months after Train to Gain’s full national roll-out, Jaine and her colleagues are pleased with the way employers have responded to the service. Some regions have done particularly well in helping hard-to-reach businesses which have never embarked on training before, while others have engaged learners very successfully.

Jaine is also proud of the breadth of the service Train to Gain offers to employers. While the pilots focused on Skills for Life and first full Level 2 qualifications, she emphasises that Train to Gain is “interested in meeting the needs of employers – at whatever level those needs are.”

If appropriate, employers are referred to partners like Investors in People UK and Jobcentre Plus and to higher education too.

“We are delighted with what the service has achieved, but we still have a long way to go,” says Jaine. “There are things we need to improve, such as keeping the paperwork down to an absolute minimum and looking at Skills Brokers’ capacity. Have we got enough Skills Brokers on the ground, for instance, and have they got the knowledge, skills and experience that we need them to have to do their job effectively?

“I don’t want to paint too rosy a picture but we all feel that Train to Gain is absolutely going in the right direction and is offering a service that is fit for purpose and that we all want to back.”

Employers up and down the country are expressing high satisfaction rates with Train to Gain and the way it delivers training support at a time, pace and place to suit them.

The LSC monitors Train to Gain very carefully to ensure that its key customers are getting the service they need to succeed.

The feedback from businesses across England has been excellent so far. Demand for Train to Gain has increased eight-fold since August 2006 and more than 22,000 employers are now using the service. Independent appraisals have been carried out by organisations like the Institute for Employment Research, Institute for Employment Studies and MORI and the LSC’s comprehensive and ongoing evaluation process reveals that more than 88 per cent of employers have expressed satisfaction with the quality of the help and support they receive.

“We are delighted,” says David Greer, Skills Director, Support to Business, at the LSC. “The results have been very encouraging. The really important message about Train to Gain, that it’s about understanding and agreeing with an individual business what its full range of skills needs are and finding solutions to those skills needs, is clearly getting through.

“The landscape of training opportunities is quite confusing and when employers are focused laser-like on running a business and making it successful they don’t have time to spend hours and hours finding training solutions for their workforce. That’s why Train to Gain’s independent and impartial Skills Brokers are so important, working with businesses to understand what their skills needs are and then navigating them through the maze of training opportunities available.”

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David, who ran two small businesses himself in the early part of his career, joined the LSC when it was formed six years ago. He led the LSC’s successful delivery of the Employer Training Pilots, the precursor to Train to Gain, and is now responsible for the LSC’s Support to Business programmes, including Train to Gain, Investors in People and the Leadership and Management Programme. After years of working in workforce development and training, David has seen the importance of investing in training at first-hand.

“You see some hard benefits, like better service to customers leading to more orders,” he says. “But you also see softer impacts, like better motivation, reduced absenteeism, reduced levels of staff turnover and greater enthusiasm within the business. People appreciate being invested in.”

David is based at the LSC’s national office in Coventry but spends much of his time speaking to employers, Skills Brokers and training providers across the regions. He works closely with regional colleagues to identify and spread best practice, and alongside partners like the Regional Development Agencies and Jobcentre Plus. “We talk to everyone involved to get a feel for how

Train to Gain is working for different customers – from businesses in particular sectors to businesses in different parts of the country,” says David.

“We want to make sure that the service is on target and working consistently for them. We are continually driving the quality up and raising our expectations on behalf of customers. We are developing a series of national standards for Skills Brokers, for instance, and trialling a new standard for employer engagement by training providers.”

David points out that one of Train to Gain’s principal objectives is helping businesses that haven’t conventionally invested in training to see the benefits of doing so.

“What has struck me forcibly is that if you deliver training support to businesses at a time, pace and place to suit them and the way they work, they often move forward to invest in further training, particularly at higher levels,” he says. “Getting small businesses to recognise the benefits of training and then telling other businesses we haven’t worked with before about those benefits is a very powerful way of taking the whole skills agenda forward too.”

When the Leitch Report on the UK’s long-term skills needs was published in December last year (2006), David and his colleagues were pleased to see Train to Gain’s contribution to helping businesses get the training they need acknowledged.

“What we have achieved in the first year of Train to Gain is a clear demonstration that if you provide training in ways that work then businesses will invest in training,” he says.

“Train to Gain is about helping a business understand its skills needs, sourcing high-quality solutions, making sure they are delivered flexibly, helping to evaluate the impact and then looking at where the business goes next. It’s not rocket science really.”
"A robust service that's here to stay"

Train to Gain is helping more and more businesses across England tackle skills shortages. As demand for the service grows, what does the future hold?

Train to Gain is playing an instrumental role in tackling this crisis head-on by providing employers with expert advice on how and where to train staff to increase productivity,” says David.

“Employers told us this is what they need to succeed and Train to Gain is now helping more than 80,000 employees to get qualifications.”

The Further Education and Training Bill, unveiled in November 2006, proposed a raft of measures to equip learners with high-quality skills – and David acknowledges that the LSC has a crucial part to play in helping the Further Education sector achieve these objectives over the coming years.

“The Bill gives the LSC a very clear role in terms of helping to reshape the sector,” he says. “Our role is to work with the sector to ensure that it is fit for purpose. We’re absolutely committed to meeting the needs of learners and employers alike and we’re supporting training providers to be responsive to those needs.”

One of Train to Gain’s huge strengths is the flexibility of workplace training it offers but David stresses that this relies heavily on the ability of training providers to adapt and evolve.

“Obviously some providers are meeting employers’ needs better than others and we need to bring everyone involved in delivering Train to Gain up to the best,” he says. “We have a number of fairly large consortia, for instance, where there’s a lead provider who brings with them a number of other providers with specialist or niche areas of expertise and skill. That kind of collaborative partnership is clear evidence of the positive way in which Train to Gain is changing how providers work.

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“It’s important too that providers think about the way in which they market themselves to employers and how they go out and stimulate business both with their existing employers and new employers. Providers also have to look at their staffing structures and the way they work. Obviously not every employer will want their learners to be trained at unusual times, even on Christmas Day, but some do.

“As Train to Gain develops I think we’ll also see the development of more specialisms, where providers concentrate on a sector and develop their expertise within it. It’s essential that we have training providers who can respond to the needs of every sector and every industry.”

As Train to Gain prepares to enter its second year David is upbeat about what the next 12 months holds.

“I really get the feeling that the whole Further Education sector is up for this challenge,” he says. “There’s a long way to go but Train to Gain has made a really positive, really pleasing start – and we’re very proud of that.”

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"We want to achieve the same goals"

The first issue of Train to Gain News looks at the working relationship between the LSC’s national office and a high-performing region which has been praised for its innovative telemarketing initiative.

The LSC’s national office works in partnership with all nine regional offices to drive Train to Gain forward.

Members of the Train to Gain policy team at national office keep in close contact with their regional colleagues. As well as a monthly meeting with the regional Train to Gain directors, hosted by each region in turn and chaired by David Greer, the LSC’s Skills Director, Support to Business, there are regular updates, phone calls and emails back and forth.

“It’s a constant dialogue,” explains Glenn Robinson, Director of Train to Gain. “It’s important after all to remember that the LSC is one organisation. Before we launched Train to Gain last year we spent 18 months working with the regions, getting their input to develop the service. Train to Gain wasn’t something devised at the national office in Coventry and then given to the regions to implement. The regions informed every aspect of its development and we built on their experience gained during the development phase.

“Now it’s up and running, the regions are responsible for implementation and delivery and we hold the national framework. We are there to support them and ensure consistency across the service. We’re partners in the sense that we support one another and want to achieve the same goals. It’s a two-way street.”

At the end of last year the national policy team held a six-month review with all the regions. David Greer, Jaine Clarke, the LSC’s Director of Skills for Employers, and Glenn Robinson engaged in dialogue with three regions each, analysing their performance against targets. They were also keen to identify good practice and share it with other regions.

One high-performing region which has been widely praised for its success in delivering Train to Gain is the East Midlands, a diverse area encompassing Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

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Its range of innovative strategies includes the use of a telemarketing bureau to generate leads from employers, particularly hard-to-reach businesses which haven’t engaged in training before. Using Leicester-based telemarketing organisation Tangible Results to contact employers and outline the benefits of Train to Gain has helped the East Midlands office achieve notable results. An impressive 91 per cent of employers engaged in Train to Gain in the East Midlands are hard-to-reach businesses – the highest percentage in the country.

“Train to Gain is going very well in the East Midlands – both on the Skills Brokerage side and on the training provision side,” says Karen Woodward, Director of Regional Skills at East Midlands LSC. “There is still much more work to do but overall we are very happy with the performance to date.

“We took a decision very early on that we needed a front-end service whose job it was to stimulate demand from particularly hard-to-reach employers.

“We recognised that the Skills Brokerage service and the Brokers themselves were a very expensive resource and to have them on the phone trying to generate contacts themselves wasn’t the best way of using an expensive resource. Using a telemarketing company has been very successful. The feedback from them is that Train to Gain is a service that employers really welcome.”

Each region focuses on sectors relevant to its regional skills needs. In the East Midlands the focus is on seven sectors – the main ones are engineering, health and social care and construction. The region also works closely with the Regional Development Agency and has built a sophisticated IT system to track leads after they are generated.

“We have set up a very strict customer journey,” says Karen. “David Way, the LSC’s Director of Skills, and Stephen Marston, Director General of the Lifelong Learning and Skills Directorate at the Department for Education and Skills, have both visited Tangible Results to see how it works. They were extremely impressed by the way leads are referred to the Brokerage service and how the Brokerage service responds.

“Once a lead has been passed to the Brokerage service they only have 48 hours to respond to the employer and they then have to visit the employer within ten working days. It’s all logged on to the system.”

The region uses 32 full-time Skills Brokers employed by East Midlands Business Ltd, a partnership formed by Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Chambers of Commerce. It also works with 39 lead training providers to offer full Level 2 qualifications – although many additional providers are involved in the delivery of other training.

Karen can’t speak highly enough of the way the regions and the national office are working together to deliver Train to Gain.

“There has always been a very strong network working together to shape Train to Gain in the way it should be shaped, getting from the big idea to operational detail,” she says. “We have an excellent working relationship.”
Growing skills

How Train to Gain helped a garden centre boost its employees’ motivation and confidence and gave them the skills to do their jobs even better.

The staff at Kershaws Garden Centre in Brighouse, West Yorkshire, have always prided themselves on the quality of service they offer customers.

This thriving family business was founded in 1864 and now has 12 employees. It sells everything from plants, trees and shrubs to garden tools and coldwater fish. Last year Kershaws Company Secretary Mark Yates decided he wanted to help his employees broaden their skills further – but was uncertain how to find a suitable training course. He turned to Train to Gain, which immediately put him in touch with a Skills Broker from the West Yorkshire Enterprise Partnership.

"Training is very important but often the cost of it is prohibitive if you are a small company," explains Mark. "Train to Gain is ideal for us because unless you have someone working on your behalf it can be difficult to keep in touch with what is available. It’s vital to find the right training. Otherwise you find that you are a square peg in a round hole and that systems that work elsewhere won’t work here."

After discussing the garden centre’s skills needs with the Skills Broker, Mark and his father Nicholas, who is Managing Director of Kershaws, offered the employees the opportunity to do an NVQ Level 2 in Customer Service. This qualification includes units on delivering good customer service and dealing with customers, both face to face and on the telephone.

Three employees started working towards their NVQ Level 2 in August 2006. One has since left the company but the other two, who both work outside as plant area assistants, looking after plants and helping customers, continued training. One of them recently completed their qualification and the other hopes to do so later this year.

Mark was delighted by the fact that training provider Enterprise Solutions Training, based in nearby Kirkburton, could deliver all the training in the garden centre’s own staffroom – and at a time to suit the business.

“It’s very helpful that it can be done on-site,” says Mark. “It makes it more relevant to the job the staff are doing and doesn’t take them away from the garden centre. If something unexpected happens or someone has a query while our employees are training it means we can still get hold of them and it doesn’t affect the day-to-day running of the business.”

Mark is full of praise, too, for the impact Train to Gain has had on the business. Not only has the training increased his employees’ motivation and confidence but it has given them the knowledge and skills to do their jobs even better.

“I am very impressed,” says Mark. “We’ll definitely do more training in the future.”

“I’ve learnt a few things from my staff’s training – it just goes to show that being in the business for a while doesn’t teach you everything.”

Back to home
Employers give Train to Gain the thumbs-up

New figures show more and more employers think training is the key to success.

Over 22,000 employers across England are now using Train to Gain.

Independent research commissioned by the LSC shows that nearly 17,000 of these are employers brought to Train to Gain by Skills Brokers and training providers. Not only that, but 58 per cent are hard-to-reach employers who haven’t recently engaged in vocational training – well in excess of the LSC’s target of 51 per cent.

The figures also reveal that demand for the service is growing and businesses are finding the expert training advice they receive invaluable. More than 88 per cent of employers who have used the Skills Brokerage service say they are satisfied with the help provided, while a third of employers rate it ten out of ten.

Train to Gain covers a broad range of sectors. So far Health and Care businesses have accounted for 22 per cent of leads, Retail and Wholesale for 14 per cent and Manufacturing for 13 per cent.

The learner participation figures are encouraging too. Between April and December 2006 there were 73,211 learner starts on Basic Skills, Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. The majority are employed in sectors where low skills have traditionally predominated and 70 per cent are aged between 25 and 49.

Substitution Information

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Small Business Council member Sean Taggart explains why Train to Gain is such a crucial service for small businesses.

"Train to Gain is the only truly impartial and independent Skills Brokerage service that’s available to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with no upfront costs.

Most small businesses don’t have the money to pay for expensive consultants so the opportunity to have someone external coming in, assessing their business and training needs and giving impartial advice without simultaneously trying to sell them something is a very attractive proposition.

“The kind of holistic advice that Train to Gain Skills Brokers deliver is pretty unique. One of the difficulties in convincing small businesses that haven’t yet engaged with skills development to change their behaviour is that it’s often promoted to them as a mantra – ‘skills are good for you.’ While they might agree with that on an altruistic level it won’t change the behaviour of an SME.

“But the advantage of Train to Gain is that it analyses skills on a business needs level. It links up the skills requirements of a business with its business objectives. It makes employers realise that training enables people to do their jobs better and that helps the overall strategy and performance of the business. It means they can deliver different services, better services and make the business more profitable.”

Sean Taggart
Group Managing Director of the Albatross Travel Group
Member of the Small Business Council

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Where can I find out more?

The Train to Gain website provides a wealth of information about the service – everything from how Train to Gain works to case studies of recent success stories. Please visit traintogain.gov.uk

If you’re an employer who’d like to learn more about the business benefits of Train to Gain, please call 08000 15 55 45. If you’d like to find out about Train to Gain across the regions, you can contact your regional marketing and communications team. Regional contact details are available from the LSC Helpdesk on 08700 900 6800. Copies of the Train to Gain leaflets shown here can be ordered from Granby Marketing. Please email lsc@granbymsl.co.uk for details.

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