Skills Broker Standard

2nd Edition
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Foreword

The publication of the Skills White Paper in March 2005 outlined plans for the DfES and the LSC to develop a “…framework of service standards to be implemented consistently across the country so as to ensure that brokerage and business support are developed in a way that achieves simplicity and transparency in delivering services to employers.”

To oversee this Chris Humphries, the Director General of City & Guilds, was asked by the LSC to Chair a Steering Group, the Business Support as a Profession Group (BSaP), made up of representatives from key stakeholders and partners such as DfES, LSC, SBS, SBC, RDAs, SSCs, IIP UK, SFEDI and BLU. The BSaP Group undertook and completed many tasks, including:

- the development of a common standards framework for all business support practitioners, based on existing standards;
- the development of a specialist module for skills brokers within this framework, to meet the needs of the Train to Gain programme;
- the determination of common assessment arrangements and support for ongoing professional development so as to bring about a continual process of improvement in standards of service offered to clients.

The 1st Edition of the Skills Broker Standard, which was published in March 2006, represents the outcome of the second of those tasks. The Standard was developed, following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, for Skills Brokers working within the Train to Gain programme; an independent and impartial service to diagnose business need and source appropriate training provision.

In October 2007 the work of the BSaP Group came to a close. It was at this time that the responsibility for the custodianship of the Skills Broker Standard, along with the National Register for Business Consultants, passed to the Institute of Business Consulting (IBC). The IBC determined that the value of the advice and guidance provided by the BSaP Group should not be lost and asked Group members to continue to offer their expertise in the further development of those areas of responsibility.

The publication of this second edition of the Skills Broker Standard represents part of the work of the BSaP Group; the learning gleaned from practise; policy changes affecting the framework of brokerage, including the LSCs Plan for Growth, and, in particular, the valuable contribution of Practitioners.

The Skills Broker standard sits within a common framework for all business support practitioners, which at its heart is a customer driven experience. The first section of this Standard briefly sets the context by explaining what the common framework is and what the Core Competencies cover. The Skills Broker standard represents the additional elements that Skills Brokers are expected to demonstrate in order to provide an independent and impartial service for employers.

All members of the BSaP Group, from their experiences and contribution to the Group, clearly recognise the contribution to UK competitiveness of raising our collective investment in skills. We believe that this revised module for Skills Brokers will further contribute towards this goal.

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1 Now (DIUS), the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills
2 Train to Gain ‘A Plan for Growth’ (November 2007-July 2011) LSC-P-NAT-070212
1 The Common Standards Framework

1.1 Through consultation the Steering Group developed a National Common Standards Framework for Business Support and Brokerage which covers:

(a) **The Core Competencies**: These are the competencies for business information, business advisers and generalist brokers. These build on existing SFEDI business support standards, Business Link professional standards and IiP practitioner standards.

(b) **The Individual Specialisms**: These are individual modules covering the competencies necessary to be an effective specialist, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and experience.

Diagram 1 – Common Standards Framework

1.2 In addition to the generic Core Competencies there are a number (not fixed) of specific specialisms for which the above diagram is intended as an illustration only. National and Regional partners will need to determine the suite of national standards to be made available. However, it will be for each Region to determine what specific array of specialisms they wish to adopt. Whilst it is clear that all would wish to adopt the
standards for skills brokerage, manufacturing advice and start ups, beyond that the standards adopted will be in line with the Regional Economic Strategy of each Region.

1.3 Any practitioner working within the framework must demonstrate competency in the core standard, plus any additional standards for which they believe themselves to be a specialist. For example, a skills broker must demonstrate competence in the core plus the Skills Broker standard. It is important therefore that the standard for Skills Brokerage is read in conjunction with the revised Core Competencies.

Revised Core Competencies for business support

1.4 Through a consultation led by SFEDI, iip UK and BLU, all business support organisations’ customer facing staff and leading business interest groups have been able to contribute to the development of a revised set of Core Competencies.

1.5 These three organisations worked together to pool all existing information on current practice. Standard writers supported by SFEDI then produced various drafts of the Core Competencies which led to a final version being submitted to the Business Support as a Profession Steering Group.

1.6 All three organisations have signed up to these Core Competencies and will require these Core Competencies to be met within their suite of standards. The Core Competencies are recognised as National Occupational Standards; they have been written as single element units, so that each unit can be credited within the Framework for Achievement. There are eight single element units making up the Core Competencies.

1. Maintain effective business support relationships with clients
2. Help the client to analyse the business and decide the way forward
3. Enable clients make implement changes in their business
4. Encourage clients to act for themselves
5. Develop networks to provide access to information, support and resources
6. Evaluate the quality of your own practice in business support
7. Develop your own ability to provide business support
8. Monitor the performance of the business support service

1.7 A copy of the Core Competencies may be viewed and downloaded at the following URL: www.sfedi.co.uk/standards/business-support-standard
2 Overview of the Skills Broker Standard

2.1 The Standard represents the individual specialisms that skills brokers are expected to demonstrate in order to effectively fulfil their role as a skills broker for the Train to Grain service.

2.2 In terms of setting the Standard, the “bar” has been taken from various public policy statements on skills brokerage published over the last 12 months. These include the Skills White Paper\(^3\), the LSCs ‘Agenda for Change’ Prospectus\(^4\) and ‘Plan for Growth’\(^5\), of which the key aspects may be summarised as:

“At the heart of Train to Gain is a brokerage service that works on behalf of the employer. It acts independently and impartially, to support analysis of current and future skill needs.”

“It links needs to business performance, and provides advice about which local training providers can best meet those needs.”

“Beyond that core of free or subsidised training up to Level 3, skills brokers provide support to design and source a comprehensive training package to meet the employer's wider needs.”

“...there is a demand from employers to use brokers’ support to source training for their wider needs, including at Level 3 and higher, and for non qualification based learning”

“... it is part of the role of the broker to encourage employers to see the benefit of higher skills; signpost the availability of suitable Level 3 or other programmes in the area; and source delivery of that training within an integrated package where the employer is willing to pay”

“...the broker acts on behalf of the employer, able to direct resource to whichever provider can best meet the employer’s needs; and that the broker can make those decisions in real time, securing rapid, flexible response in meeting the employer’s training needs”.

“Where a suitable provider is not identifiable locally, the skills broker will work with the LSC to identify a provider from outside the area if necessary”.

“...ensuring that skills brokers are able to encourage employers to develop relationships [with providers] that will meet their ongoing skills needs”

Development of the Standard

2.3 The first edition of the Skills Broker Standard was developed, following consultation with a wide range of national and regional stakeholders as well as taking advice and comments from local practitioners working with employers, and approved by the Business Support as a Profession Group in January 2006.

\(^3\) HM Government (2005) Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work. Cm 6483
\(^4\) LSC (August 2005) Learning and Skills-the agenda for change, The Prospectus LSC
\(^5\) Train to Gain ‘A Plan for Growth’ (November 2007-July 2011) LSC-P-NAT-070212
2.4 This, the second edition of the Standard, follows the preceding consultation process coupled with the impact of attendant policy reviews and change, and the valuable experiential contribution of practitioners. The second edition was approved by the Business Support as a Profession Steering Group in March 2008.

Overview of the Standard

2.5 This specialist module has been designed to complement the Core Competencies. Its aim is to ensure that accredited skills brokers delivering the Train to Gain service are: credible to employers, effective in assisting employers to meet their training needs and capable of adding public value by helping employers see the value of sustained investments in skills, in line with their business goals.

2.6 There are 14 elements within the Standard which can be categorised into three headings:

(a) what you need to show;

(b) what you need to know; and

(c) what experiences you will bring.

2.7 These elements are summarised in the following table;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a) What you need to show    | a 1. Make the linkages between improved business performance and the contribution of skills  
|                             | a 2. Identify specific skill solutions in relation to business goals / challenges  
|                             | a 3. Proactively network and search new solutions  
|                             | a 4. Help the client critically assess a training provider offer  
|                             | a 5. Broker deals with training providers  
|                             | a 6. Be the catalyst for action  
|                             | a 7. Help the client to build confidence and capacity to evaluate and broker their own solutions  |
| b) What you need to know    | b 1. The framework of training and development delivery  
|                             | b 2. The training provider infrastructure  
|                             | b 3. How to give relevant advice on learning and development solutions for clients  
|                             | b 4. The context of employee entitlements and rewards  |
| c) What experiences you will bring | c 1. Organisational development and change  
|                             | c 2. Specific industry sectors and business models  
|                             | c 3. Applying standards or business awards for organisational development  |

2.8 Each of the 14 elements is detailed by a number of indicators. A skills broker is required to provide evidence of their effectiveness against these indicators.

2.9 For example, in response to (a) 1 “Make the linkages between improved business performance and the contribution of skills”, The Skills Broker’s performance would be assessed against the following indicators:
understand the aspirations of the client and the role that skills can play in meeting these aspirations;

objectively challenge and encourage the client to review their business aspirations;

identify and explain the added value role that skills can play for a number of different business scenarios;

make the business case for promoting skills improvement at all levels in the organisation.
3 The Skills Broker Standard

a) What you need to show

3.1 This concerns the specific techniques and abilities that a skills broker has learnt through their professional practice and that can be demonstrated to assessors by client observation, interview and simulation.

3.2 “What you need to show” consists of 7 elements a1–a7 for each of which there are a series of indicators. An effective skills broker must demonstrate competence in each of these indicators.

a1. Make the linkages between improved business performance and the contribution of skills

1.1 Understand the aspirations of the client and the role that skills can play in meeting these aspirations

1.2 Objectively challenge and encourage the client to review their business aspirations

1.3 Identify and explain the added value role that skills can play for a number of different business scenarios

1.4 Make the business case for promoting skills improvement at all levels in the organisation

a2. Identify specific skill solutions in relation to business goals / challenges

2.1 Understand the client’s skill needs and identify appropriate solutions

2.2 Use appropriate diagnostic and planning tools with the client to help identify areas of skills gaps and shortages across the organisation

2.3 Show how meeting these skill needs will add value to the business

2.4 Be able to help the client match skill needs to appropriate solutions

a3. Proactively network and search new solutions

3.1 How to network with colleagues and others to identify new training providers

3.2 Able to build relationships with a range of training providers: FE, HE and independent

3.3 When in the client’s interests can identify new training providers to enable them to join the LSC funded framework

a4. Help the client to critically assess a training provider’s offer

4.1 Proactively identify a range of information sources to help the client make informed decisions

4.2 Equip the client with the skills to critically evaluate proposals from training providers and to review references objectively

4.3 Present options to the client with comparable summaries of cost and service
4.4 Summarise the meaning of inspection reports and quality standards in order to help the client reach a decision

4.5 Continuously seek feedback from colleagues on the performance of local training providers in meeting employer needs

4.6 Encourage the client to take up references and suggest ways in which this can be objectively achieved

**a5. Broker deals with training providers**

5.1 Remain accountable to the client and conduct all brokerage activities impartially

5.2 On behalf of the client, ensure that the training provider puts together a responsive and flexible package that adds real value in meeting the skills needs of the client and their employees

5.3 Broker deals, which deliver value for money for the client, ensure that the client is aware of the value of any public subsidy provided

5.4 Take into consideration the culture and values of the client in drawing up potential training providers for the client to work with

**a6. Be the catalyst for action**

6.1 Act as an interpreter between the client’s needs and the ‘language’ of qualifications

6.2 Ensure that training providers respond promptly to requests for information, presentations and subsequent queries

6.3 Help to build trust between the client and training provider

6.4 Monitoring the agreed arrangements with the employer, ensuring that key milestones are met

6.5 Look for development plans to add to the skills of employees rather than merely accrediting the skills of existing employees

6.6 Achieve leverage for public funds by looking for matched investments by the client

6.7 Understand the operational cycle of the business in relation to training delivery

**a7. Help the client to build confidence and capacity to evaluate and broker their own solutions**

7.1 Identify an evaluation framework for the client to allow them to review the impact of their skills development plan

7.2 Ensure the client is able to develop their own evaluation framework to review the impact of investing in skills

7.3 Link the evaluation frameworks into the wider strategy of the business and understand its impact on the ‘bottom line’

7.4 Ensure that the client understands the steps to take to broker their own solutions
b) What you need to know

3.3 This is the knowledge and experience that a Skills Broker has and is confident in using as a basis for providing advice.

3.4 A Skills Broker needs to demonstrate that they know, understand and are able to apply each of the following elements b1-b4 by providing evidence of their knowledge of the indicators listed. The list is not exhaustive. New policies may emerge which influence change, Skills Brokers will need to apply and evidence their understanding and knowledge of such changes.

b1. The framework of training and development delivery

1.1 Train to Gain including:
   .1 Funding packages
   .2 Contribution to wage costs
   .3 Eligibility of employers, individuals, courses and types of qualifications
   .4 Differences between vocational, academic and professional qualifications
   .5 Skills for Life
   .6 Main awarding bodies
   .7 Progression routes through qualifications, e.g. NVQ 2, 3 & 4
   .8 Learning pathways e.g. how does an employee become qualified?
   .9 Vocational Qualification reform
   .10 Skills Pledge
   .11 Local Employment Partnerships
   .12 Specialist Support Service (large employer, Leadership and Management and sector focus)
   .13 Learning and Skills Council National Employer Service
   .14 Development of Employer Engagement Staff
   .15 Targets for Levels 2, 3 & 4.

1.2 Role of the OfSTED Inspectorate, including:
   .1 Understanding inspection process
   .2 Reading and interpreting reports
   .3 Assessment process for learners

1.3 Purpose, role and expertise of:
   .1 Learning and Skills Councils
   .2 Regional Skills Partnerships
   .3 Regional Development Agencies
   .4 Business Link
   .5 Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)
   .6 Sector Skills Councils and how to access specialist sectoral knowledge
   .7 Ufi/learndirect
   .8 Professional Membership Institutes
   .9 Jobcentre Plus

1.4 Economic, business and sectoral needs of a local (regional) economy including:
.1 Regional skills priorities
.2 Sector Skills Agreements (including):
   - Sector Compacts
   - Sector Qualification Strategies

1.5 Learning and Skills Council funding framework including:
   .1 Fee remission policies and learner support funding
   .2 Completion, achievement and success rates

1.6 Other local workforce development offers for employers, for each:
   .1 Funding
   .2 Eligibility

b2. The training provider infrastructure

2.1 Named contacts in local (Regional):
   .1 Further Education colleges
   .2 Independent training providers (including work based training providers)
   .3 Higher Education Institutions
   .4 Ufi-learndirect learning centres

2.2 Leading training providers as recognised by:
   .1 Inspection Grades
   .2 The Training Quality Standard
   .3 CoVE status
   .4 Skills academies
   .5 Framework for Excellence
   .6 Explicit employer linkages / endorsement
   .7 National Training Awards

b3. Advice, learning and development solutions for clients

3.1 Sources of information, advice & guidance, including:
   .1 Learning and Skills Council ‘Employer Guide to Training Providers’
   .2 Train to Gain - ‘A Plan for Growth’
   .3 Broker Interactive (the skills broker e-Learning tool)
   .4 Business Link branded IDB service
   .5 learndirect information services
   .6 Train to Gain Broker website
   .7 Train to Gain website
   .8 nextsteps and other information, advice and guidance services
   .9 National Learning Directory
   .10 Regional supplier databases
   .11 Jobcentre Plus
   .12 Professional Associations, for example, CIM, ACCA, CMI, ILM
   .13 Union Learning Representatives
3.2 Development solutions, including:
  \[1\] Welfare to Work agenda, including:
  \[\cdot\] Skills for Life (inc ESOL)
  \[\cdot\] Foundation Learning Tier
  \[\cdot\] Integrated Employment and Skills
  \[\cdot\] Link with pre-employment provision for Job Centre Plus
  \[\cdot\] Local Employment Partnerships
  \[2\] Enhanced Leadership and Management provision
  \[3\] Informal learning and peer based networks
  \[4\] Coaching and mentoring services
  \[5\] e-learning and distance learning
  \[6\] Investors in People
  \[7\] Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships for adults and NVQs
  \[8\] Foundation Degrees

3.3 Part time FE courses for 16-18 year olds

3.4 HE Provision

3.5 Short courses e.g. ICT, project management, health and safety

b4. The context of employee entitlements and rewards

4.1 Basic understanding of statutory entitlements relating to the
  \[1\] National minimum wage
  \[2\] Health and Safety
  \[3\] Equal opportunities
  \[4\] Disability discrimination
  \[5\] Employer liability insurance
  \[6\] Working Time Directive
  \[7\] Statutory Leave
  \[8\] Statutory time off for study for 16-18 year olds

4.2 Basic understanding of HR practices relating to
  \[1\] Role of appraisals in identifying skill needs
  \[2\] Evaluating training outcomes for employees
  \[3\] Pay scales, structures and sources of pay information
  \[4\] Equality & diversity
  \[5\] Contracts of employment
  \[6\] Staff consultation processes
c) What experiences you will bring

3.5 A Skills Broker will have a history of professional experiences which will enable them to build a professional, empathic relationship with a client.

3.6 A Skills Broker needs to show evidence that they understand a range of indicators for elements c1-c3:

**c1. Organisational development and change**

1.1 Developing business plans
1.2 Designing and managing programmes of Organisational Needs Analysis
1.3 Developing training plans
1.4 Organisational restructuring / business change programmes
1.5 Designing / implementing HR policies and procedures
1.6 Recruitment

**c2. Specific employer groupings by size, sectors and ‘business model’**

2.1 Size
   - Micro businesses (<10 employees)
   - Small enterprises (<50 employees)
   - Medium enterprises (50-250 employees)
   - Large employers

2.2 Sector
   - Key sectors, in line with each Region’s regional economic strategy
   - Voluntary sectors

2.3 Type
   - Ethnic minority businesses
   - Family businesses
   - Social enterprises
   - High growth businesses

**C3. Applying standards or business awards for organisational development**

3.1 Experience of using business improvement tools including:
   - Investors in People
   - Business Excellence Model
   - Balanced Scorecard

3.2 Supporting clients in applying for business awards including:
   - Local business awards
   - National Training awards
   - Apprenticeship awards
Appendix A - BSAP Steering Group

A.1 The Business Support as a Profession Steering Group is chaired by Sean Taggart and has project secretariat and project implementation support from the Institute of Business Consulting.

Current membership of the BSAP Steering Group is listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Chapman</td>
<td>Chartered Management Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Derbyshire</td>
<td>National Federation of Enterprise Agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gavin Dollin</td>
<td>Department for Business Enterprise &amp; Regulatory Reform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Edge</td>
<td>Life Long Learning UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigel Gibbons</td>
<td>UK Trade &amp; Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raphaela Kennedy</td>
<td>Institute of Business Consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audrey McNeill</td>
<td>UK Trade &amp; Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Miles</td>
<td>East Midlands Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>John O'Reilly</td>
<td>East Midlands Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynda Purser</td>
<td>Institute of Business Consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glenn Robinson</td>
<td>National Learning and Skills Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony Robinson</td>
<td>Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sean Taggart (Chair)</td>
<td>Albatross Travel</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Wakefield</td>
<td>Investors in People UK</td>
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# Appendix B - Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCA</td>
<td>Association of Chartered Certified Accountants</td>
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<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>Business Link</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLU</td>
<td>Business Link University</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSAP</td>
<td>Business Support as a Profession</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIM</td>
<td>Chartered Institute of Marketing</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMI</td>
<td>Chartered Management Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoVEs</td>
<td>Centres of Vocational Excellence</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBC</td>
<td>Institute of Business Consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communications Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage</td>
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<tr>
<td>IiP</td>
<td>Investors in People Standard</td>
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<td>IiP UK</td>
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<td>ILM</td>
<td>Institute of Leadership and Management</td>
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<td>LSC</td>
<td>Learning and Skills Council</td>
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<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
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<td>RDAs</td>
<td>Regional Development Agencies</td>
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<td>Small Business Council</td>
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<td>Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative</td>
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<td>University for Industry</td>
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<sup>6</sup> Now DIUS, the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills.