

Key Determinants of High Performing Train to Gain Providers in the East Midlands

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Of interest to partners, providers and employers, and all those interested in learning and skills in the East Midlands

Key Determinants of High Performing Train to Gain Providers in the East Midlands

A Final Report to the Learning and Skills Council,
East Midlands

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In October 2008, ECOTEC Research and Consulting was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council, East Midlands to conduct research into the key determinants of high performing Train to Gain providers in the East Midlands region. The research took place during October and November 2008, with final analysis and reporting in December 2008. This executive summary presents a brief overview of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the research.

Research Aim

The main aim of the study was to identify the key criteria that characterise high performing providers and to produce a route map to help existing and future Train to Gain providers improve and increase the range and quality of their Train to Gain provision.

Methodology

The methodology comprised of four key stages: an inception and development stage which included a meeting with the LSC to discuss the project; visits to 10 high performing providers which involved in depth discussions with key representatives from the providers in relation to their Train to Gain provision based on a visit schedule which acted as a guide; telephone interviews with 14 'other' providers which involved interviewing a representative sample of 'other' providers delivering in the East Midlands based on a telephone interview schedule in order to provide additional context to the research and a final analysis and reporting stage.

Summary of Key Findings

The high performing providers were selected by the Learning and Skills Council, East Midlands according to their performance against their Level 2 and Skills for Life targets based on data from 2007/2008. The sample was also designed to take into account a cross section of providers with different delivery volumes: large providers with 1000 plus learners, medium sized providers with 500-1000 learners and small providers with less than 500 learners; and also type of provider and geographical location.

Characteristics of High Performing Providers' Delivery Models

- A variety of different types of delivery model were in use across the high performing providers. Three single providers were delivering their own Train to Gain contract exclusively (both Level 2 and Skills for Life); two single providers were delivering their own contract but were sub contracting Skills for Life; four providers were the lead partners of consortia responsible for managing the overall contract and delivering a proportion of it themselves; and one provider was responsible for managing a consortium without undertaking any delivery.

- Team structures usually involved four core functions with clearly defined responsibilities as follows: a leadership and management function; an employer engagement function; a delivery function and a quality function. On the whole, the high performing providers had established clear roles and responsibilities for their Train to Gain staff. Train to Gain was supported at the highest level within their organisations.
- The high performing providers who managed a consortium had clear guidelines on how their consortium partners are chosen and a strong commitment to partnership working with a focus on openness, transparency and open communication. The lead partners of consortia highlighted the importance of having in place structured quality assurance processes in relation to bringing on board new partners to the consortia and thereafter in working with partners on an ongoing basis. All of the high performing providers had introduced changes to their area of work and were focused on continuous improvement.

Characteristics of High Performing Providers' Employer Relationships

- The high performing providers visited as part of the study demonstrated that they had clear processes in place in support of the employer journey right from how they sourced their intelligence about employers through to the final evaluation of employers' experiences. The high performing providers used multiple methods to source employer leads and worked with a wide range of employers in terms of size; the majority delivering Train to Gain to large employers.
- High performing providers had established long term relationships with their employers and acknowledged the importance of managing these employer relationships on an ongoing basis. Historical relationships were important to a majority of the providers and most generated repeat business on a consistent basis as a result of these relationships.
- The majority of high performing providers stressed the flexibility of their provision and emphasised the importance of being responsive to employers' needs. Innovation emerged as a cross-cutting theme with regards to the provision that high performing providers delivered to employers. This included developing bespoke packages for employers such as new qualifications and piloting specific areas of activity in relation to their delivery of Train to Gain.
- All the high performing providers monitored employer satisfaction, gathering feedback from employers on an ongoing basis and possessed a business like mentality with a business like attitude/commercial approach. The majority had a number of quality marks including EMSkills, Matrix, liP and Customer First. One provider had achieved the TQS and a couple of others had applied and were awaiting the outcomes of their assessment.

Delivery of Skills for Life

- In general, the approach to delivering Skills for Life targets varied across the high performing providers. For example, several of the high performing providers including the lead partner of a consortium and some of the smaller providers sub contracted their Skills for Life delivery to specialist organisations in this area. Others had specialists within their organisations that they used to deliver Skills for Life.
- The approach to how Skills for Life was actually delivered also varied across the board. In some cases, it was run in parallel with an NVQ, embedded within an NVQ or delivered separately. Most high performing providers highlighted that how Skills for Life was delivered was dependent on the client and learner needs and the needs of the job role within a given sector.
- With the exception of a couple of the 'other' providers who also performed strongly in terms of Skills for Life, one of the biggest contrasts between the high performing providers and 'other' providers was in terms of their performance and approach to Skills for Life. The high performing providers had been more successful in finding solutions to delivering their Skills for Life targets.

Criteria for Success

- In terms of what worked well in relation to their delivery models, high performing providers identified the way in which they worked with employers and their employer responsiveness as a key area. Other key themes related to the focus and knowledge and also the flexibility of their staff. For consortium lead partners, a genuine partnership approach was identified as important and key to their delivery model working well.
- The high performing providers were asked to identify their **key success factors** in relation to the delivery of their Train to Gain provision. The key themes that emerged reinforced the main themes mentioned above in relation to what worked well in terms of their own delivery as follows:
 - ▶ **Staff/team** – a key theme was that of the staff/team that they had in place. For example, comments in this area including having a **strong team**, having **proactive staff** delivering a professional service, having a **dedicated team**, having **knowledgeable and competent** assessors and having the dedicated support roles for Skills for Life.
 - ▶ **Flexibility and responsiveness** – another key theme was in relation to their **flexibility and responsiveness** to employer need and ability to adapt to change.
 - ▶ **Partnership working** – the majority of lead partners of consortia cited aspects related to the theme of **partnership working**. One lead partner emphasised the importance of **building partnership relationships** with its consortium members. Another highlighted its **open and**

honest approach and the importance of '**managing those partnerships and relationships effectively**'.

Other areas mentioned were around **experience, enthusiasm**, having a **clear strategic direction** and having robust quality assurance/audit processes.

- In terms of **lessons learned and advice**, most of the high performing providers emphasised the need to be **realistic**; to have a **realistic strategy** and targets. Linked to this, high performing providers identified the need to develop a '**business attitude**' to the delivery of Train to Gain. **Flexibility** was also emphasised as well as **financial competence** through developing strong financial projections and a business plan. High performing providers advised others to **build long term relationships** with employers and have **strong quality assurance** processes.
- Regarding the route map, suggestions from high performing providers included having an emphasis on planning and strategy; having an outline of a delivery model; highlighting the need to maintain relationships with employers; having a best practice route map; having an actual toolkit with all the necessary documentation required to deliver Train to Gain; having a form of local benchmarking of Train to Gain performance; and offering support and mentoring for newer/less experienced providers. One provider suggested the best approach would be for providers to go through the TQS standard as this produces an individual action plan for organisations.

Conclusions

This final section summarises the main conclusions arising from the research with a particular emphasis on the characteristics of high performing providers.

The ten high performing providers represented a balance in terms of organisational type (private training provider or FE College); delivery model (lead partners of a consortium or a single provider); and delivery volume (small, medium and large delivery volumes) illustrating that it is possible to deliver Train to Gain successfully through different delivery models and scales.

Although the delivery models varied depending on organisational structure, type of organisation and delivery volume, they did share some key common characteristics. On the whole, the high performing providers had established experience in delivering employer responsive provision over a consistent period of time. In addition, on average, those with medium to large delivery volumes also held Train to Gain contracts in other regions so had this experience to draw upon.

The Train to Gain teams of high performing providers were well structured and they had clear processes in place which underpinned the delivery of their work related to Train to Gain. The high performing providers who managed consortia had clear quality approval processes in place for choosing partners to joint their consortia and then for monitoring performance thereafter. They also had a strong commitment to partnership working and managed their consortia on the principles of openness, transparency and open communication. They were also supportive of their partners and

would support, for example, smaller organisations to improve their processes to join the consortium.

The high performing providers were either able to cover a wide range of sectors or had particular strengths in certain sectors or qualification areas. All of the high performing providers demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement illustrated by changes they had introduced to improve their delivery since first starting to deliver Train to Gain. Train to Gain was well supported within the high performing providers' organisations and linked in well with their other provision e.g. Apprenticeships.

Historical relationships with employers were a key feature with repeat business a benefit of their efforts to maintain relationships with their employers on an ongoing basis. Efforts to meet the needs of businesses were illustrated by those high performing providers who mentioned the bespoke provision they had developed. In terms of delivering Skills for Life, a common factor was that the majority of high performing providers had found solutions to delivering their Skills for Life targets and that they had the capacity to deliver in this area. All the high performing providers put forward suggestions for the 'route map'. Based on the findings of the research, ECOTEC has developed a 'toolkit' as a stand alone document as an outcome of the study.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the findings outlined above and on the suggestions of high performing providers.

- A key theme emerging from the discussions with high performing providers; is that providers need to have strong financial competence and business planning within their organisations and, in line with this, to be able to set themselves a realistic strategy and targets in relation to Train to Gain. The recommendation would be for providers to ensure that their business planning processes are as effective as they can be.
- A further emphasis was placed by high performing providers on the need to build long term relationships with employers. The recommendation would be for providers to work on an ongoing and consistent basis to building their relationships with their client base.
- For the lead partners of consortia, there was a stress on the need to have strong contract management and quality assurance processes in place. The recommendation would be for the lead partners of consortia to draw on the best practice procedures of the lead partners in the high performing consortia to put in place strong quality assurance processes.
- Further to suggestions of the high performing providers regarding the 'route map', we recommend that the Learning and Skills Council consider the development of a more detailed 'Best Practice Route Map' which would include sections on, for example, Broker Relationships, Learner Relationships and Guidance, Employer Relationships and Guidance, Guidance on

Managing a Consortium with key hints or tips for providers. This would probably take the form of a guidebook.

- In addition, we recommend that the Learning and Skills Council considers utilising the experience of its high performing providers more directly in a kind of 'peer mentor' role e.g. High performing providers could be asked to present to less experienced providers at a provider network meeting, for example, on what it is like from their experience to 'live a Train to Gain contract'.

1.0 Introduction

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council East Midlands in October 2008 to undertake research into the key determinants of high performing Train to Gain providers in the East Midlands. The research took place during October and November 2008.

This report presents the key findings from the research.

1.1 Research context

The Train to Gain service was launched in August 2006 in order to provide impartial, independent advice on training to businesses across England. The Leitch Review¹, published shortly after the launch of the service in December 2006, produced a critical analysis of the UK's skills base which it concluded "*remains weak by international standards, holding back productivity, growth and social justice*" (p. 3). The overarching recommendation from the Leitch Review was that the "*...UK commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020, benchmarked against the upper quartile of the OECD*" (p. 3). Amongst the Leitch Review's main recommendations was one stating that all public funding for adult vocational skills in England, apart from community learning, be routed through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts (now called Skills Accounts) by 2010.

In July 2007, the Government published its response to the Leitch Review called World Class Skills.² The purpose of World Class Skills is to outline the practical reforms to be undertaken in order to close the skills gap by 2020. It highlights the commitment to Train to Gain indicated by the projection that investment in the programme will rise to £900 million in 2010/11, clearly indicating a much larger role for Train to Gain. From 08/09, the plan is to enable employers to access match funding for Level 3 training programmes; for Train to Gain to support discrete Skills for Life programmes and for it to give access to Apprenticeships. To date, the focus has been on support for small and hard to reach employers; the plan is to expand the service so that it is available to all employers. Another key area mentioned is to look at the possibility of skills brokerage and business support brokerage being combined into one service through the Business Simplification Programme.

These proposals were subsequently outlined in more detail in Train to Gain's A Plan for Growth³. Approximately, one third of the adult skills and Further Education budget will be routed through Train to Gain by July 2011 – over £1 billion pounds i.e. providers will need to ensure that Train to Gain becomes part of their mainstream budget and a core part of their service to their local communities. The Plan commits to projecting a clearer image of what Train to Gain is and what it can do for employers. The plan involves increasing work with medium and larger companies and

¹ Leitch Review of Skills (December 2006) Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills: Final Report.

² DIUS (July 2007) World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England.

³ LSC (November 2007) Train to Gain: A Plan for Growth – November 2007 – July 2011.

more specialist support for large employers with up to 5,000 staff. It also prioritises the transfer of skills brokerage across to Business Link from April 2009. Small to medium sized companies will benefit from increased investment in leadership and management skills. The plan also announced Skills for Life as a stand alone option.

The key measures in 'A Plan for Growth' are a revised employer engagement strategy; a compact with each Sector Skills Council; a transformation programme for training providers (the World Class Skills Programme); a Public Service Skills Compact in each region; improved performance management and consistency along with a range of other flexibilities and measures. The plan recognises the need to improve the employer experience: *“Our end-to-end review of process will ensure that employers receive a consistent experience of the Train to Gain service from skills brokerage to skills solution, no matter where their business is in the country”* (p. 10). The plan acknowledges the view that there is still much work to be done *“...before we can guarantee access by employers every where to high quality responsive provision, geographically and sectorally”* (p. 10). The Plan for Growth states that there is still much work to be done in terms of developing the Train to Gain service across all regions concluding that there has been too much regional variation both in terms of performance and the delivery models used.

Following on from the Plan for Growth, more recent performance information from the Train to Gain and Skills Pledge 2007/08 Period 12 MI report shows that the Train to Gain programme has experienced strong growth in both starts and achievements in 2007/08. The total number of achievements recorded for 2007/08, for example, surpasses the achievements delivered in 2006/07 by 39 per cent.¹ The East Midlands has approximately 48² providers engaged in leading on the delivery of Train to Gain provision across the region. The Annex to the Period 12 MI report provides more detailed information on a regional basis.³ This shows, for example, that in terms of learner starts, the East Midlands region achieved 104% against its profile for 2007/08 (four other regions either met or exceeded their profiles; four did not). In terms of achievements (Level 2 Achievements and Level 3 Jumper Achievements), the East Midlands achieved 94% of its profile for the period. Only three regions exceeded their performance targets for the period. The East Midlands with 94% was fourth out of the nine regions. In terms of Skills for Life, the East Midlands achieved 88% of its profile for starts and 41% of its profile for achievements. In terms of its starts, it was fourth out the regions in terms of performance and sixth in terms of achievements. The Regional Commissioning Plan 2008-09⁴ confirms that the region has made a good start with the Train to Gain programme but recognises that targets are challenging and the programme will need to achieve even more in the future. To this end, the plan outlines a number of challenges related to Train to Gain, related actions and measures of success. Key challenges cited include:

- The operational effectiveness of Train to Gain brokerage needs to improve if the regional targets for Train to Gain over the next few years are to be met.

¹ LSC (September 2008) Train to Gain and Skills Pledge 2007/08 Period 12 MI Report.

² LSC (February 2008) Learning and Skills Council East Midlands Regional Commissioning Plan 2008-09.

³ LSC (September 2008) Annex: 2007/08 Train to Gain Regional Data Book – PERIOD 12 (August-July 2008)

⁴ Ibid.

- The Skills for Life performance as part of Train to Gain is below expectations. One of the actions related to this is improving the capacity-building of providers in respect of the Skills for Life offer available within Train to Gain.
- Train to Gain will need to increase its capacity if the targets set out in the Leitch implementation plan are to be met. One of the actions related to this is continually reviewing the existing provider base and looking to build capacity or increase the number of quality providers engaged and delivering Train to Gain.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify the key criteria that characterise high performing providers and produce a route map that will help existing and future Train to Gain providers improve and increase the range and quality of their Train to Gain provision. The overall research objectives were to:

- identify and evaluate the key characteristics of high performing Train to Gain providers in the East Midlands;
- identify and draw together common key characteristics that make a material contribution to high performance; and
- produce a practical user friendly route map for Train to Gain providers that identifies the key characteristics and makes recommendations about how providers should/could go about replicating/implementing those characteristics in their organisation.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology comprised of four key stages as follows:

- **An Inception and Development stage** which included a meeting with the LSC to discuss the project, the interview approach and the envisaged end product of the research, the 'route map'.
- **Visits to 10 High Performing Providers** which involved in depth discussions with key representatives from the providers in relation to Train to Gain based on a visit schedule which acted as a guide. The LSC identified the high performing providers according to their strong performance in both Level 2 and Skills for Life and to reflect both a representative range of provider size, type and geographical location within the region.
- **Telephone Interviews with 14 'Other' Providers** which involved interviewing a representative sample of 'other' providers delivering in the East Midlands region based on a telephone interview schedule. The sample was again designed to reflect a representative range of provider size, type, geographical location and performance level.

- **Analysis and Reporting** which involved the analysis of the qualitative information from the visits to high performing providers and the telephone interviews with 'other' providers; the production of the research report and 'route map'.

1.4 Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- ▶ **Chapter 2** outlines the characteristics of the organisations which participated in the research;
- ▶ **Chapter 3** explores the delivery models currently in operation in the East Midlands;
- ▶ **Chapter 4** assesses the process of working with employers;
- ▶ **Chapter 5** explores the strategies and systems in use by providers;
- ▶ **Chapter 6** focuses specifically on the delivery of Skills for Life;
- ▶ **Chapter 7** discusses the key factors of success from the providers' perspective; and
- ▶ **Chapter 8** provides a summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Throughout the report, we also use case studies to illustrate the key themes that have emerged from the research. Please see Table 2.1 on page 7 for a list of these case studies. The case study number allocated in the table is that used in the case study examples in the body of the report. For the case studies, the practice of individual providers is sometimes drawn upon more than once but, if so, it is in relation to a different aspect of provision.

2.0 Characteristics of the Organisations

This section outlines the characteristics of the high performing providers and the providers which participated in the telephone interviews.

The high performing providers were selected by the Learning and Skills Council East Midlands according to their performance against their Level 2 and Skills for Life targets based on data from 2007/2008. The sample was also designed to take into account a cross section of providers with different delivery volumes: large providers with 1000 plus learners, medium sized providers with 500-1000 learners and small providers with less than 500 learners; and also type of provider and geographical location.

The providers selected to take part in the telephone interviews were again designed to be as representative a sample as possible of 'other' providers delivering in the East Midlands. The sample was designed to reflect a representative range of provider size, type, geographical location and performance level.

2.1 Characteristics of High Performing Providers

The ten high performing providers consisted of four with large delivery volumes; three with medium sized delivery volumes and three with small delivery volumes. Nine had achieved over 100 per cent plus against their Level 2 profiles and eight had achieved 50 per cent plus against their Skills for Life profiles. Six had been involved in the Employer Training Pilot (ETP), hence have been involved in delivering Train to Gain related provision for 4-5 years; three had been delivering since the national roll out of Train to Gain in 2006 and one provider gained its first contract in the second year of Train to Gain (2007/2008) after having previously acted as a subcontractor in two consortia.

The providers who had been involved in the ETP acknowledged that this had been helpful in terms of putting the processes in place to then run with the delivery of Train to Gain from its national roll out in 2006/2007 and felt that the experience gained through the ETP had set them up to deliver Train to Gain from its inception.

A variety of different types of delivery model are being used across the high performing providers:

- ▶ Three single providers exclusively delivering their own contract
- ▶ Four consortium models with lead partners managing the overall contract and also delivering a proportion of the contract themselves (The four consortia have 45, 23, 21 and 20 partners respectively)
- ▶ Two single providers sub contracting Skills for Life
- ▶ One provider which exclusively manages a consortium without undertaking any of the delivery itself

On average, the high performing providers with medium to large delivery volumes hold Train to Gain contracts in more than one region. Two, for example, currently deliver Train to Gain in all of the nine LSC regions. These two providers are national organisations whose head office is based outside the East Midlands. Those with contracts for small delivery volumes are East Midlands based.

The majority of providers (nine) have contracts for other types of work e.g. WBL, E2E, Apprenticeships, Employability Contracts etc. Only one provider indicated that the majority of its business is related to Train to Gain comprising of 90% of its business.

Table 2.1 outlines the profiles of the high performing providers who were involved in the study. The delivery volumes refer to number of learners that providers are contracted to work with i.e. large providers are those with 1000 plus learners, medium sized providers are those with 500-1000 learners and small providers are those with less than 500 learners.

Table 2.1 Profile of high performing providers

Case Study No.	Type	Delivery Volume	Delivery Model	Profile	Length of Time Delivering TTG
Case Study 1	FE College	Large	Lead Partner of a Consortium. It also delivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large Organisation ▪ Turnover approx 50 million ▪ 1200 staff overall ▪ National provider ▪ Lead partner with approx 45 PTPs in the consortium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involved in the ETP Pilot. ▪ Delivering for approx 4-5 years.
Case Study 2	FE College	Medium	Single Provider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium Sized College ▪ 450-500 staff overall ▪ National provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involved in the ETP Pilot. ▪ Delivering for approx 4-5 years.
Case Study 3	Private Training Provider (PTP)	Small	Single Provider which Sub Contracts Skills for Life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The provider is the TTG arm of a Group which has 85 staff overall ▪ 12 members of staff involved in TTG ▪ Delivers in East & West Midlands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involved in the ETP Pilot. ▪ Delivering for approx 4-5 years.
Case Study 4	Private Training Provider (PTP)	Large	Lead Partner of a Consortium. It also delivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has 26 national centres ▪ 300 staff overall ▪ Small consortium with a couple of other providers ▪ National provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involved in the ETP Pilot. ▪ Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
Case Study 5	Network	Medium	Lead Partner of a Consortium. It does not deliver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Network has over 40 members. ▪ Lead partner with approx 23 providers in the consortium. ▪ Delivers in East Midlands(& some members of the consortium now deliver out of region through the new flexibilities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Network has been delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
Case Study 6	FE College	Large	Single Provider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employer responsive team has: 3 Account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The college has been

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				Managers, 3 Sales Staff (+3), 2 tele-sales, 2 administrators & the Director. 150-200 assessors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivers in East and West Midlands, London & North East. 	delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
Case Study 7	Private Training Provider (PTP)	Small	Single Provider which sub contracts some Skills for Life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employs over 80 staff across a variety of contracts ▪ East Midlands ▪ Involved in TTG: IAG team with 3 staff, Employer Engagement team with 6 staff, Delivery team with about 20 staff, the QA Manager & Admin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Started delivering its own contract in August 2007 [Year 2]
Case Study 8	Private Training Provider (PTP)	Large	Lead Partner of a Consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Global organisation employing 2500 people overall. ▪ Delivers in all 9 LSC regions. ▪ Lead partner with approx 35 providers in the consortium overall, up to 20 in the East Midlands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involved in the ETP Pilot. ▪ Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1] ▪ Delivered in 5/9 regions in Year 1. Delivered in all 9 regions from Year 2.
Case Study 9	FE College	Small	FE College, Lead Partner of a Consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General FE college ▪ 5 members of staff in managing work related to the partnership & around 18 involved in internal delivery ▪ Lead partner with 21 providers in the consortium. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
Case Study 10	Private Training Provider (PTP)	Medium	Single Provider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It delivers in all 9 regions. ▪ Team of over 500 assessors overall. ▪ It has central teams at a national level with structure for the regional level that is the same in each region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Involved in the ETP Pilot. ▪ Delivering since Year 1

2.2 Characteristics of 'Other' Providers

The fourteen providers who participated in the telephone interviews consisted of four with large delivery volumes; four with medium sized delivery volumes and six with small delivery volumes. Three had achieved over 100 per cent plus against their Level 2 profiles and three had achieved 50 per cent plus against their Skills for Life profiles. Six had been delivering since the Employer Training Pilot so for 4-5 years in the area of Train to Gain; six had been delivering since the national roll out of Train to Gain in 2006; one provider gained its first contract in the second year of Train to Gain (2007/2008) and another provider who had participated in the ETP pilot started delivering in the second year of Train to Gain.

Six of the providers participating in the telephone interviews had participated in the ETP and had been delivering Train to Gain related provision since then; six started in the first year of Train to Gain with a couple gaining their first contracts in Year 2 even though one of these providers had participated in the ETP.

Nine of the 'other' providers hold contracts as single providers; four are lead partners of consortia and one provider described itself as a lead partner working with partner providers (it did not characterise itself as a consortium model in a true sense).

Several of the 'other' providers are organisations with a national reach; most have either a regional reach with several working in more than one region or have a local focus in the East Midlands. The majority of the 'other' providers deliver other contracts, particularly Apprenticeships. Only one provider's business is exclusively related to Train to Gain.

2.3 Overall assessment of similarities and differences between High Performers and 'Other' providers

In terms of performance, whilst three of the 'other' providers had achieved over 100 per cent plus against their Level 2 profiles and three had achieved 50 per cent plus against their Skills for Life providers; performance levels were not as consistent as amongst the high performing providers. Like the high performing providers, some of the providers participating in the telephone interviews had participated in the ETP, however on average more of the high performing providers, approximately two thirds, had participated in the ETP compared to a quarter of the 'other' providers. Most of the 'other' providers also operated primarily as single providers.

3.0 Delivery Model

As identified in section 2, there are a range of delivery models currently in operation amongst the high performing providers. This section of the report outlines the relevant types in more detail, provides case studies as illustration and briefly considers any similarities or differences between them and the 'other' providers participating in the telephone interviews.

3.1 Structure of the Train to Gain Team

Three of the high performing providers are 'single providers' who manage and deliver their own contract exclusively. There are two further 'single providers' which subcontract some or all of their Skills for Life provision.

The size of the teams of the single providers varies depending on the size of the organisation and their delivery volume for Train to Gain. For example, one of the small providers in terms of delivery volume has 12 members of staff involved in delivering Train to Gain. One of the providers with a medium sized delivery volume has around 48 members of staff in its Train to Gain team. A provider with a large delivery volume has a larger team consisting of an Employer Responsiveness Team which consists of 3 Key Account Managers, 6 Sales Staff, 2 tele-sales staff, 2 administrators and the Director of Employer Responsiveness. They also have a Quality Assurance Manager and a bank of 150-200 assessors to draw upon.

In terms of sectors, one of the single providers predominantly delivers in the Care and Construction sectors; another specialises in delivering a generic qualification, the ITQ, which can be delivered in any sector; another delivers across all sectors and another focuses primarily on Care but is expanding into Warehousing. The final single provider delivers in a number of sectors: Retail, Hospitality (part), Warehousing, Mail Services and has also started working in Care and delivers generic NVQs in Customer Service and Business Administration.

Four of the high performing providers are the lead partners of consortia but also manage and deliver their own contract exclusively. One lead partner of a consortium is purely responsible for the management of the contract and the consortium.

The five consortia vary in size from one small consortium arrangement with a lead partner and 2 partner providers, to three consortia with 20, 21 and 23 members respectively and one consortium with 45 members.

Three of the consortia deliver in most sectors and two focus on specific areas. For example, one has 25 partners who are Construction focused. The lead partner of this consortium delivers in: Engineering, Customer Services, Health and Social Care, Passenger/Transport, Health, Business Administration and Hospitality. The final consortium has two partners; one delivering in the Security sector, the other delivering ITQs and Skills for Life. The lead partner delivers in: Care, Automotive

and Hospitality. Broadly speaking, the consortia are able to cover a wider range of sectors than the single providers.

In terms of how Train to Gain was delivered across the organisations, there were a variety of approaches. Two FE College providers had an Employer Engagement Unit or a Business Development Unit which liaised with the curriculum areas in the College to deliver the NVQs. One FE College had a Train to Gain team within the college but also its own assessors. Another College had a completely autonomous arm which delivers all of its employer responsive provision and operates as a business. One provider only delivered Train to Gain. For three of the private training providers; Train to Gain was integrated alongside their other work e.g. Apprenticeships, with one looking to better integrate its work with its Apprenticeship provision. For another provider it was separate to its other work. Generally, apart from the organisation only delivering Train to Gain and the organisation which described its work in this area as quite separate (this organisation contracts manages a consortium but does not deliver), Train to Gain fitted in with the delivery of their other provision and was well integrated. All four colleges identified as high performing providers have support at the highest levels within their organisations for their work.

3.1.1 Volumes of Delivery

Within each model type i.e. single provider or a consortium model; there are high performing providers with different volumes of delivery. Amongst the single providers, there was one organisation with a large delivery volume, two with medium sized delivery volumes and two with small delivery volumes. The two single providers with small delivery volumes sub-contracted either some or all of their Skills for Life provision. Amongst the consortia, three providers had large delivery volumes; one had a medium sized delivery volume and one small. On balance, the consortia have delivered larger volumes. The single provider with a large delivery volume is an autonomous unit of a college with extensive experience of providing employer responsive provision on a large scale.

3.1.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The Train to Gain teams of high performing providers usually involved four core functions with clearly defined responsibilities as follows:

- **A Leadership and Management function** responsible for how the organisation engaged with employers, funding targets set by the LSC and the employer engagement strategy.
- **An Employer Engagement function** involved in bringing in the business and managing employer relationships.
- **A Delivery function** which carries out all functions with regards to delivering on the ground such as carrying out initial assessments including establishing learner needs.

- **A Quality function** involved in associated support around administration such as enrolling learners, quality and funding eligibility.

The roles and responsibilities within each core function also differ depending on the volume of delivery.

3.1.2.1 *High Performing providers with large volumes of delivery*

Providers delivering large volumes of Train to Gain tend to have the following roles and responsibilities within their respective teams:

- **A Leadership and Management** team consisting of a Director of Employer Engagement;
- **An Employer Engagement Responsiveness** team including an Employer Responsiveness Manager; 3 Key Account Managers; 6 Sales staff and 2 tele-sales staff;
- **A Delivery** team with a bank of 150-200 assessors to draw upon; and
- **A Quality** team including a Quality Assurance Manager and 2 administrators.

The case study below outlines the team structure and delivery model of an FE College who is a lead partner of a consortium with a large volume of delivery. (The case study number aligns with the case study number given in Table 2.1 on page 7).

Case Study 1: FE College, Lead Partner in a Consortium

Background

This Lead Partner was involved in the Employer Training Pilot and has been delivering Train to Gain since it first started. Outside its partners, it also delivers Train to Gain through its curriculum areas within its 7 internal departments. The provider gets the majority of its leads through networking such as breakfast meetings, business meetings and organising employer forums.

Team Structure

The provider's Train to Gain consortium consists of 45 private training providers. The lead contractor has a Partnership Manager who manages the external partners and, as a lead partner, it is also in charge of securing and processing the funding, carrying out contract compliance, quality assurance processes, tracking delivery and processing of payments to partners.

Most of the partners either find their own leads or get their leads from the College. The Delivery of Train to Gain is split on a 50/50 basis between the College and the partners.

Sectors and Qualifications

The consortium's strategy is not based on delivering Train to Gain on a sector basis but on business need. The lead partner targets national employers with large volumes of learners and contracts. The sectors that it delivers in include Engineering, Customer Services, Health and Social Care, Passenger/Transport, Business Administration, Hospitality and Construction. 25 of the 45 partners deliver in the Construction

sector.

Outline of Delivery Model

Leadership and Management Team

The Leadership and Management team of the lead partner consists of a Director of Employer Engagement who is responsible for the consortium's targets and the College's employer strategy.

Employer Engagement Team

The Employer Engagement team of the lead partner consists of an Employer Responsiveness Manager. The Employer Responsiveness Manager manages the sales team and works with the College's 7 internal departments responsible for delivering Train to Gain to explore how internal delivery can be increased.

The Employer Engagement team also consists of Sales/Engagement Professionals who are responsible for sourcing employer leads, visiting the employers, and carrying out the Organisational Needs Analysis to examine the best training option to support an employer's needs that is whether to offer a Train to Gain route or a WBL route.

Delivery Team

The delivery team of the lead partner assesses the most appropriate delivery style for the employer to cater for those who may work shift patterns. The lead partner then works with either its external partners (45 partners) or internal partners to explore the best way to deliver to the employer.

Quality Team

The Delivery team of the lead partner passes the information over to the Compliance team who enrolls the learners. Their partners also undergo quarterly process reviews.

3.1.2.2 *High performing providers with medium volumes of delivery*

High performing providers with medium volumes of delivery tend to have a slightly smaller team with the following roles and responsibilities:

- **A Leadership and Management team** consisting of a Train to Gain co-ordinator responsible for recruitment, setting targets for achievement;
- **An Employer Engagement team** consisting of 8 Recruitment consultants who engage with employers;
- **A Delivery team** including 35 trainers and assessors; and
- **A Quality team** consisting of 1 contract co-ordinator and 3 administrators.

The case study below outlines the team structure and delivery model of an FE College and a single provider with a medium sized delivery volume.

Case Study 2: FE College, Single Provider

Background

This College was involved in the Employer Training Pilot and has been delivering Train to Gain since it first started. The Train to Gain team is a separate unit within the college but reports directly to the Vice Principal and Senior Management Team. Although it is a separate unit, it does not operate in a 'silo' environment.

Team Structure

The Train to Gain team consists of a Train to Gain Co-ordinator, 8 Recruitment Consultants, 1 Contract Co-ordinator and 3 Administrators/Members which consists of the Quality team. There are 35 trainers and assessors.

Sectors and Qualifications

The College predominately offers Level 2 qualifications through Train to Gain. It delivers mainly in the Construction and Care Sectors because of its good FE provision in these sectors and links with employers in these areas. It has a CoVE for Construction. Its involvement in the ETP had enabled the college to iron out any issues before starting to deliver its first full Train to Gain contract. Since starting to deliver Train to Gain, the College has added more qualifications to its portfolio and increased its staffing levels. The mode of delivery has essentially remained the same.

Outline of Delivery Model

Leadership and Management Team

The Train to Gain Co-ordinator oversees the recruitment, setting targets, audit requirements and financial aspects of Train to Gain.

Recruitment Consultants

The Recruitment Consultants are responsible for employer leads, working on the lead and making the initial contact with the employer. They visit the employer and complete an 'employer checklist'. This includes completing the paperwork with the employer, carrying out a basic skills analysis which will last between 30 mins - 1 hour, checking that the learners will be able to gather enough evidence for their NVQ in that environment.

Quality Team

The Admin/Quality team is responsible for putting the data into PICS and for case noting the learners by section heads and then assigning them to an assessor. The Admin/Quality team then contacts the assessors and informs them of the learners, course and dates and checks all the registrations have been completed. The Admin/Quality team makes sure the learner is seen every 6-8 weeks formally by the assessor so learning outcomes and progress can be monitored and recorded. The Admin/Quality team is responsible for ensuring completion by the learners and claiming certification with the awarding body and the LSC.

Delivery Team

The assessors deliver training and see the learner every 6-8 weeks to monitor and record learning outcomes and progress.

3.1.2.3 *High performing providers with small volumes of delivery*

Providers delivering small volumes of Train to Gain, tend to have:

- **A Leadership and Management team** consisting of a Director of Train to Gain.
- **An Employer Engagement team** including an Employer Responsive manager and 6 members of staff responsible for employer leads.
- **A Delivery team** consisting of 3 members of IAG staff, 20 assessors and 3 internal verifiers.
- **A Quality team** – consisting of a Quality manager.

The case study below outlines the team structure and delivery model of a private training provider and a single provider who sub contracts part of its Skills for Life provision.

Case Study 7: Private Training Provider, Single Provider (sub contracting part of its Skills for Life provision)

Background

This provider first started delivering its own Train to Gain contract from August 2007 (Year 2). From January 2008, the organisation started to build up specific dedicated teams to perform certain roles within the organisation and in relation to Train to Gain.

Team Structure

At a managerial level, the organisation has one of its Directors and its WBL Manager involved in Train to Gain, there is an Employer Responsive Manager and an Employer Engagement Team (with 6 members of staff) an IAG team (with 3 members of staff) and a delivery team of around 20 assessors and 3 internal verifiers. The Quality Assurance Manager across the WBL division also has a role regarding Train to Gain.

Sectors and Qualifications

The provider predominately offers Level 2 qualifications through Train to Gain with some Skills for Life (and Level 3). It delivers mainly in the Health and Social Care Sector but is developing its offer in the Warehousing sector. It currently offers around 12 different qualifications and has worked towards the development of one qualification achieving accreditation for a Health and Social Care: Children and Young People NVQ in response to the needs of a particular employer. There are now 5 employers with staff engaged on this NVQ.

Outline of Delivery Model

Leadership and Management Team

The Company Director oversees the management team, supporting it in achieving its goals, targets and objectives and takes a strategic lead on employer engagement. The WBL Manager has been brought in due to previous experience around IAG to embed IAG within the Train to Gain contract and to provide research and intelligence around the Train to Gain contract in general e.g. audit requirements etc.

Case Study 7: Private Training Provider, Single Provider (sub contracting part of its Skills for Life provision)

Employer Engagement Team

The organisation created the role of an Employer Responsive Manager within its Employer Engagement Team specifically because of the Train to Gain contract. The role is responsible for ensuring that the organisation maintains good relationships with its existing clients and engages with potential clients e.g. direct calls to employers, attending events and conferences to engage with employers. The team engages with the employers and is tasked with bringing in the business and with liaising with the employer around the service offer.

IAG Team

The IAG team's focus is on the learner. The IAG Team is responsible for undertaking the initial assessments with the learner, establishing learner need, funding eligibility etc. The organisation has done a lot of work around embedding stronger IAG within Train to Gain so that now around 2 hours are spent on average per learner to ensure that their needs are met.

Delivery Team

Across its different awards, the organisation has a team of around 20 assessors and 3 internal verifiers who are responsible for delivering the programme of learning.

3.2 How high performing providers manage their consortium

The high performing providers who manage a consortium have clear guidelines on how their consortium partners are chosen and a strong commitment to partnership working which focus on openness, transparency and open communication as an approach to fostering strong partnership working.

They highlighted the importance of having in place structured quality assurance processes in relation to bringing in new partners and thereafter working with partners on an ongoing basis. The case study that follows outlines the detailed processes involved with managing a consortium.

Case Study 8: Private Training Provider, Lead Partner of a Consortium

Background

The Private Training Provider is a global organisation and currently delivers in all of the nine LSC regions. It was involved in the Employer Training Pilot and has been delivering Train to Gain since it first started. There are currently 35 sub contractors in the whole consortium with approx 20 providers delivering in the East Midlands. The organisation also has a separate delivery arm which delivers a proportion of the consortium's targets. The consortium, as a whole, covers every sector; perhaps with the exception of Agriculture which it covers to a lesser extent. The organisation's own delivery arm covers: Retail, Business Administration, Health and Care, Public Services, Team Leading and Management, Hospitality, Childcare, ICT and Skills for Life. The delivery arm delivers both Apprenticeships and Train to Gain. Currently, work is being done at a senior level to improve links with other contracts that the organisation delivers as, in effect; the organisation can support a learner through an Apprenticeship, help them into work and once in work provide support through Train to Gain.

Outline of Delivery Model (with an emphasis on how the consortium is managed)

In terms of managing the consortium, the provider has a strong quality approval process in place.

- 1) If a provider is interested in joining the consortium, it has to complete a Register of Interest outlining who they are, what it is they can do, which regions they like to work in etc.
- 2) The lead partner then assesses whether it needs the provider within the consortium and, if so, where it needs the provider in relation to the contract space that it has. If the lead partner decides to progress with the application, the provider is invited to present to the lead partner about its company, its ethos, what it is that it does and its success rates, so the lead partner can find out about the provider as a company.
- 3) If the lead partner is interested in taking the provider to the next stage, the provider will go through a very comprehensive full quality approval process where a member of the lead partner's quality team will visit the provider and bench mark them against some essential and desirable criteria. This will involve looking at all areas of the provider's delivery including quality systems and procedures, success rates and the capacity that the provider has in its organisation including its leadership and management roles. The lead partner may support a smaller organisation which may not have everything in place, as long as it has the desire to put everything in place before delivery starts.
- 4) Once providers in the consortium are in place and have been quality approved, they are referred to the lead partner's Train to Gain Project Manager who carries out an initial monitoring visit e.g. to examine whether the provider has set up the right systems in place in line with Train to Gain guidance.
- 5) To foster the partnership, the lead partner carries out quarterly partnership events which are used to update partners on progress as well as disseminating any new guidance.

3.3 Key Characteristics of High Performing Providers' Delivery Model

There were a number of common characteristics across the high performing providers in relation to how their delivery models were set up which have been outlined below in six key areas.

- **Partnership** - consortia providers (four) emphasised the importance of partnership working and making their consortia as partnership based as possible (i.e. it was more than just a lead contractor and sub contractor relationship). For example, these lead partners stressed their commitment to working in partnership, the importance of building relationships and the openness, transparency of discussion and communication which they described as key to making a partnership work. They also referred to partnership events held on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly which were used to update partners on progress, disseminate new information and to host workshops etc).
- **Quality Assurance** - several of the lead partners of consortia highlighted the role and importance of the quality assurance or approval process that they had in place in terms of bringing on new partners to the consortium and, thereafter, in working with partners on an ongoing basis.

- **Staff roles** - On the whole, the high performing providers had established clear roles and responsibilities for their Train to Gain staff. For example, staff involved in liaising directly with employers within their Employer Engagement/Sales Teams had professional experience in sales or some commercial experience and those involved in delivery such as assessors had industry backgrounds.
- **Train to Gain coverage** – the high performing providers, particularly the consortia (4), were able to cover most sector areas or focused in delivering in specific areas. Those with single contracts (6) were more likely to focus their delivery in areas where they had strengths such as in Construction, Care or ITQ.
- **Linkages with other programmes** - some providers were looking at developing better linkages between their Train to Gain contracts and other programmes that they delivered e.g. linking in better with Apprenticeships or Employability Contracts.
- **Continuous improvement** - all of the high performing providers had introduced changes to their area of work. For example, some providers mentioned change with relation to quality such as tightening quality processes; improving quality of training; introducing quarterly reviews with subcontractors etc. Some also referred to specific changes which they have introduced. For example, one lead partner of a consortium referred to an improved payment process it had introduced for partners, another referred to the introduction of a 'validation visit' as part of the needs assessment process.

3.4 Delivery model of 'Other' Providers

Nine of the 'other' providers were 'single providers' and the size of their teams within the Train to Gain team varied depending on the size of the organisation and their delivery volume which varied between 10 – 52 members of staff.

The majority of the 'other providers offered qualifications across a range of sectors with only a few offering qualifications in key sectors in which they had strengths. For example, one delivered exclusively in the Textiles industry and another concentrated primarily in the Catering and Hospitality and Health and Social Care.

The roles within their Train to Gain teams varied. For example, one provider did not have a specialist Train to Gain team *per se* but had Regional Business Development specialist roles which were sales roles responsible for engaging with employers and maintaining existing relationships with employers. This provider had a separate Qualifications Adviser role which completes the enrolment of the learners and in terms of delivery, it had Learning Advisers which are equivalent to the Trainer/Assessor role.

The size of the four 'other' providers delivering Train to Gain on a consortia basis also varied and ranged from 4 to 20 partners. The consortia offered qualifications in a range of sectors with some focusing on a number of sectors which were the mainstay of their provision.

In terms of team structures and staff roles, these again varied. For example, one lead partner had a Contract Manager for Train to Gain (and other contracts), 3 Business Advisors and a dedicated tele-sales role. The lead partner liaised with its academic schools that provided the assessors for delivery. The 15 partners in the consortium were all private training providers each with approximately 4-10 members of staff working on Train to Gain.

For private providers, Train to Gain usually sat alongside their Apprenticeship provision and the same assessors were used for both provision. Their sales staff promoted both programmes equitably. Only one provider delivered Train to Gain exclusively.

Several of the colleges in the sample had embedded Train to Gain provision across their curriculum areas.

3.5 Overall assessment of the similarities and differences of the delivery models of High Performers and 'Other' providers

Overall most of the high performing providers had clearer team structures and defined roles and responsibilities within their Train to Gain teams. Most approached Train to Gain with a 'business like' mentality. For those that were delivering Train to Gain within a consortium, partnership working was at the core of their delivery. Amongst the high performing providers, the lead partners of the consortia had a clear lead role in terms of managing the consortia both in terms of performance management of partners and in terms of providing support services such as regular partnership meetings. They were also clear about working as a consortium. In contrast, one of the lead partners of a consortium from the 'other' providers mentioned that although they worked with partner providers, they felt that their model could not be described as a consortium in the true sense. They expressed this view because they felt that they do not work as a lead partner which specifically manages other providers to fulfil the majority of the contract.

4.0 Employer Journey

The study sought to explore how high performing providers worked with employers in relation to the initial point of visit through to the management of the relationships with employers. This section highlights the key themes which have emerged from the research and includes case studies to support the key findings.

4.1 Employer processes of high performing providers

The high performing providers visited as part of the study demonstrated clear processes in relation to how they sourced their intelligence from employers through to the initial point of contact and the employer process. The rest of the section summarises the common characteristics across their employer processes.

- **Multiple methods for sourcing employer leads** - the high performing providers used multiple methods to source employer leads including: liaising with local councils and Chambers of Commerce; marketing work, breakfast/business meetings with employers, leads being brought in by curriculum areas within FE colleges, experimental engagement of targeting particular sectors, tele-sales, networking in the business world, working with employers in mutually beneficial arrangements, asking existing clients for leads, looking at job adverts to see which companies are recruiting; initiatives such as hosting events themselves and self referrals from employers.
- **Size of employer** - the high performers worked with a wide range of employers in terms of size and the majority delivered Train to Gain to large employers.
- **Managing employer relationships** – high performing providers had established long term relationships with their employers and acknowledged the importance of managing these employer relationships on an ongoing basis. Historical relationships were important to a majority of the providers and most generated repeat businesses as a result of these relationships. For example one had the majority of its starts from repeat businesses and another had 80% of its business last year from its existing relationships with employers.
- **Brokerage Service** - the majority had not generated much work through the Brokerage Service.
- **Flexible delivery and meeting the needs of the business** - The majority of the high performing providers stressed the flexibility of their provision and emphasised the importance of being responsive to employers' needs.
- **Developing Bespoke provision** - innovation emerged as a cross-cutting theme with regards to the provision that high performing providers delivered to employers. These included developing

bespoke packages for employers such as new qualifications and piloting specific areas of activity in relation to their delivery of Train to Gain. Piloting of different approaches could include approaches to delivering Skills for Life with an employer, the introduction of E Portfolios, the piloting of delivery in a different sector and the piloting of an approach to working with a particular employer.

- **Monitoring employer satisfaction** – all the high performing providers monitored feedback from employers. This feedback was gathered through a variety of ways including evaluation forms at the end of the learning programme and also through employer surveys linked to the self assessment process. Others mentioned surveys being undertaken in line with the Framework for Excellence.
- **Business like mentality** –high performing had a business like attitude/commercial approach to the way they approached an employer. This was perhaps expected of the private training providers within the sample but was also evident in the approach of the Colleges involved in the study. Their professionalism was also evident in the members of staff interviewed as part of the study.

The three case studies below highlight the employer journey of three providers.

Case Study 3: PTP, Single Provider (sub contracting Skills for Life)	Case Study 6: FE College, Single Provider
<p>Background</p> <p>This provider was involved in the ETP pilot and has been delivering Train to Gain ever since. The provider specialises in delivering ITQ.</p> <p>Outline of Process of Working with Employers</p> <p><u>Initial contact with the employer</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) This starts with the telesales team who source their own leads using the EDS website, Applegate etc (the team used to buy databases but have found this approach as effective). 2) After contacting an employer and gaining their interest, the telesales team will book an appointment with them for an advisor to visit. 3) Advisors visit the employer and sell the initial concept to the employer at an inception meeting. 	<p>Background</p> <p>The college is a large provider. It is an autonomous unit which delivers employer responsive provision i.e. it has its own delivery staff. The organisation rarely talks about Train to Gain rather employer responsive provision as a whole. It has traditionally always worked with national employers.</p> <p>The college acquires leads through various means: networking in the business world which it has found to be most effective, linking up with other businesses in mutually beneficial arrangements, asking clients to nominate 5 leads etc. Train to Gain has extended the organisation’s competition so it categorises clients now into four groups as part of risk management e.g. those who are loyal and will stay with the college etc</p> <p>Outline of Process of Working with Employers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Leads are brought in by the Sales Team and the

<p><u>Beginning the Training</u></p> <p>4) Following the inception meeting, the advisors inform the telesales team what actions need to be taken e.g. creating a letterhead including the employer's and the provider's logo so information can be sent out to employees.</p> <p>5) The telesales team will then arrange for the employer and learners to have an enrolment meeting with an Advisor.</p> <p>6) The enrolment meeting is carried out with the Advisor. 1 hour is dedicated to induction/training needs analysis and 2 hours are dedicated to underpinning knowledge/discovering what level learners are at/ developing a programme for learners.</p> <p>7) The advisors create individual training plans and give them to the learners with distance learning resources to be completed before training begins.</p> <p>8) The administration team then assigns a group of learners to a trainer so the programme can begin.</p>	<p>Key Account Managers from the Employer Responsiveness Team. The insistence is that they are warm and qualified to start with e.g. if the team attends a networking event, the first thing it does is to bring the leads back, earmark who it wants to follow up with and act immediately that day by calling the employer back.</p> <p>2) The Employer Responsiveness Team will liaise with the employer to find out what the needs are, putting together the ONA and doing a Return on Investment matrix.</p> <p>3) The Employer Responsiveness Team returns to college and matches the needs to delivery; the Employer Responsiveness team liaises with the delivery team to make sure the package that is put together meets the client's needs.</p> <p>4) Delivery will deliver the product and the Employer Responsiveness Team check to ensure that everything is as it should be.</p>
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Case Study 1: FE College, Lead Partner of a Consortium

Background

This provider is a large organisation and a national provider. It is the lead partner in a consortium with 45 private training providers and has been involved this area of work since the ETP.

Outline of Process of Working with Employers

The core strategy of the lead partner is to establish how best to address employer needs and assess the best way to deliver to them i.e. whether to do so via the full cost recovery, WBL or Train to Gain route. The provider will visit an employer with an offer and look at the different options that could support their needs i.e. whether it is appropriate to offer support via the WBL route, full cost recovery route or Train to Gain route. The Train to Gain provision is offered as part of the 'overall offer'. The college focuses on developing 'long term relationships with employers'. The full process is outlined as follows:

- 1 An initial contact is made with the employer after a lead has been established which may come via various routes such as breakfast meetings/networks, employer forums etc

- 2 Once the initial contact is made, the sales team will visit the employer and ascertain the employer's needs. The sales team approach this from a 'business point of view' i.e. from the businesses perspective and what it is trying to achieve.
- 3 Once this has been established, the sales team examines the best training option routes which can be used to support the employer's needs i.e. whether to go via the Train to Gain route or WBL route.
- 4 Following on from this, specialist support is assigned to the employer i.e. the actual delivery team either using an assessor or trainer that will deliver to an employer.
- 5 The most appropriate delivery style is then ascertained - for example, some workers may be working on a shift pattern basis hence in some cases timescales need to be explored and the best option for that employer.
- 6 Once that has been established, they work with either the external team (partners) or internal team to explore the best way to deliver (i.e. the best partner to deliver to the employer).
- 7 They [sales team] maintain a 'pastoral role' throughout to ensure that employer's needs are met and ascertain the effectiveness of the training.
- 8 Once training has been completed they will go back to the employer to look at what effect the training has had on the business – i.e. assess the benefits of the training.

4.2 Employer process of 'Other' Providers

The 'other' providers interviewed as part of the study also used a variety of methods to source their intelligence of employers/getting employer leads. Most referred to more than one method such as local marketing, word of mouth, intelligence gained from staff, use of databases, work of sales teams, historical relationships etc.

Regarding the size of employers that they worked with, the other providers worked with a range of range; five, however, explicitly referred to working primarily with SMEs; nine providers referred to working with some large employers with one provider stating that 50 per cent of its business is from large employers.

In terms of the process of working with the employer from the initial point of contact a few provided detailed descriptions of the stages involved from the first point of enquiry through to the delivery of learning.

In terms of managing ongoing relationships with employers, the 'other' providers identified the key members of staff within their organisations with responsibility in this area, the members of staff involved were primarily from their Business Development/Employer Engagement or equivalent teams and roles and the assessors.

Approximately a quarter of the 'other' providers referred to generating repeat business from their employers.

The 'other' providers also monitored employer satisfaction using a variety of means such as employer surveys, onsite reviews and end of programme evaluations.

4.3 Overall assessment of similarities and differences between High Performers and 'Other' Providers

As with the high performing providers, on average the 'other' providers interviewed used a combination of methods to get their intelligence/source employer leads, however, they were not as pro-active and creative as the high performers.

Most of the 'other' providers managed relationships with their employers on an ongoing basis, using dedicated account managers or equivalent roles as the high performers, however with some their assessors were primarily responsible for maintaining these relationships. A key difference, however, between the two was the emphasis on 'maintaining and managing long term relationships with employers' stressed by high performing providers.

5.0 Employer Strategies and Systems

The high performing providers involved in the case studies had developed a number of strategies and systems to support their Train to Gain delivery. This section highlights the key findings in relation to these strategies and systems using case studies as an illustration where possible.

5.1 Strategies and systems used to inform Train to Gain delivery

Most of the high performing providers had developed Employer Engagement and Marketing Strategy documents to support their Train to Gain delivery. Others also mentioned additional but related strategies such as a strategy focusing on key sectors, a basic skills strategy, for those delivering in a consortium a consortium plan and working with external stakeholders such as the SSCs and RDAs.

Whilst the majority of high performing providers have MI and CRM systems in place; many were looking to improve the systems they currently used. Several lead partners of consortia mentioned moving to a web based system so they could share information more easily with their partners.

The case studies below illustrate examples of strategic documents developed by three providers

Figure 5.1 Examples of Providers' Strategies

Case Study No.	Examples of Providers' Strategies
Case Study 10: PTP, Single Provider	<p>This provider delivers Train to Gain as a single provider and was involved in the ETP Pilot.</p> <p>The provider has an Employer Engagement and Marketing Strategy. It has a Communications Strategy and a Basic Skills Strategy. In addition to the above, it has developed a document called 'Leading the Growth in Skills' which is separate to their business plan but focuses on the growth of the organisation and how it is going to grow its business around the skills that it delivers.</p> <p>This training provider which has developed E-Portfolios also has a related system called 'Learner Vision' which is a management tool. This is a transparent system allowing anyone with access to look at each individual learner's progress. The provider's staff can access the system to see the current status of the learner, the learner and employer can also access the system. An employer can look at 'Learner Vision' through their E-Portfolio system, they can log in with their own individual passwords through the website and access information about learners' progress which is presented in charts and graphs; the learner can do the same.</p>
Case Study 9: FE College, Lead	The provider used for this case study is an FE College and the lead partner of a

Partner of a Consortium	<p>consortium of 21 partners. It delivers in most sectors.</p> <p>The college's Principal has produced a strategy for the college based on a number of key themes. One of these themes is Market Success which has 20 objectives.</p> <p>The first four of these objectives relate to the School of Business Development which is responsible for Train to Gain and relate to the targets set for the Head of School. These are monitored quarterly through meetings with the Senior Management Team (SMT).</p> <p>This College is currently hoping to move to a web based CRM system which will enable all involved to share the system (including the partners)</p>
Case Study 8: PTP, Lead Partner of a Consortium	<p>This provider is a private sector organisation which manages a consortium of 20 providers within the East Midlands. The consortium covers most of the sectors in relation to their Train to Gain delivery.</p> <p>It was involved in the ETP pilots and has been involved in Train to Gain since then.</p> <p>The provider has its own employer engagement, marketing plan and business strategy which all feed into a consortium plan that it has also developed.</p> <p>Its sub-contractors all feed into its self assessment report and quality improvement plan. The subcontractors feed in their SARS and QIPS which inform the overall plan for the consortium.</p> <p>The provider has designed its own internal Train to Gain system.</p>

The majority of high performing providers had a number of quality marks including EMSkills, Matrix, liP and Customer First. One provider had achieved the TQS and a couple had applied and were awaiting the outcomes of their assessment. Others were currently engaging with the Framework for Excellence. The majority of providers had set processes around gathering feedback from learners and employers.

Figure 5.2 Quality Standards

Case Study 6: FE College, Single Provider

This provider has achieved the Training Quality Standard. The process of going through the TQS enabled the college to reflect and improve its employer responsive provision. Firstly, the process enabled the college to look at its employer responsive provision from a business perspective. It has helped the college improve its service to employers by improving how it works with employers to ascertain what impact the service provided will have on the employer's business and how this impact will be measured. For example during their ONA process, staff will complete a Return on Investment Matrix with the employer. In preparation for the TQS the college received support from a business development consultant who helped

the college to change its image and the terminology/language it uses when speaking to potential clients/clients. For example, it has developed a standardised response which is used by members of staff from the college should someone ask them what it is that they do. The college will continue to strive for standards that indicate excellence and is keen to gain the Matrix Excellence award.

5.2 Overall assessment of similarities and differences between High Performers and 'Other' providers

Providers participating in the telephone interviews had generic strategies such as a quality strategy, Skills for Life strategy, business plan which was updated and developed on a yearly basis and college strategic plans which included sections relating to their employer engagement strategies. A couple indicated that they had other mechanisms not necessarily strategies such as an Employer Responsive Group and an Employer Induction manual. One provider however was developing an Employer Engagement strategy written around the new flexibilities another had a yearly marketing plan which set out the groups and companies that they want to work with.

As with the high performing providers, few indicated any positive outcomes from any liaison with the Skills Brokerage Service. Most have standard MIS systems in place and various recognised quality standards as per the high performers in place such as Matrix, liP, EM Skills. Many are currently working towards the TQS.

6.0 Delivering Skills for Life within Train to Gain

The delivery of Skills for Life targets has been a particular challenge for the East Midlands along with other regions. This section presents key findings that have emerged from the research in relation to Skills for Life.

6.1 Embedding Skills for Life within Train to Gain

In general, the approach to delivering Skills for Life targets varied across the high performing providers. For example, several of the high performing providers including the lead partner of a consortium and some of the smaller providers sub contracted their Skills for Life delivery to specialist organisations in this area. Others had specialists within their organisations that they used to deliver Skills for Life.

The approach to how Skills for Life was actually delivered also varied across the board. In some cases, Skills for Life was run in parallel with an NVQ, embedded within an NVQ or delivered separately. Most high performing providers highlighted that how Skills for Life was delivered was dependent on the client and learner needs and the needs of the job role within a given sector. One provider who had a strong performance in Skills for Life provision expressed the wish to further improve their Skills for Life provision by embedding it fully within the NVQs and not just running it alongside the NVQs even though it is made relevant to the sector.

Some of the high performing providers did comment that they felt it was difficult to ‘sell’ Skills for Life to employers but suggested some approaches that had worked in relation to their delivery such as contextualising it within the specific job roles of the employee, promoting it as part of the package rather than a separate entity and as part of the whole Train to Gain service.

Below are some case studies of three high performing providers who exceeded 100% on their Skills for Life targets. These case studies highlight different reasons for their success in this area.

Figure 6.1 Delivering Skills for Life

Case Study 4: PTP, Lead Partner of a Consortium	Case Study 5: Network, Lead Partner of a Consortium	Case Study 9: FE College, Lead Partner of a Consortium
<p>This provider has been successful because it has managed to sell Skills for Life to its employers with employees who mostly have literacy and numeracy needs, particularly a large private employer and its clients.</p> <p>The provider believes it has good Skills for Life numbers because it has managed to get some of the larger employers and their clients on board. Despite its success, this provider still believes it can improve its Skills for Life delivery by embedding it fully into the NVQs.</p>	<p>Initially this consortium struggled in delivering its Skills for Life targets. The Lead Partner analysed the capacity of providers in the consortium to deliver Skills for Life and realised that within the consortium it did not have as many deliverers of Skills for Life as it would have liked.</p> <p>In the second year of its Train to Gain contract, therefore, the Lead Partner put out a tender for an organisation to deliver Skills for Life. A training provider was appointed, as a result, as a Skills for Life Champion to deliver Skills for Life and work alongside other providers in the consortium. This approach has been successful. As a result of the work that the Skills for Life champion has done alongside other providers in the consortium, 5 providers within the consortium have now gone on to appoint Skills for Life assessors and deliver themselves.</p>	<p>This provider and the consortium it leads works predominantly with public sector employers. Its Skills for Life provision is mainly generated via their links with its provision supported by Trade Union education through its Trade Union Academy. The Unions and their learner representatives are therefore key in relation to spreading the message to their employers about the importance of literacy and numeracy.</p> <p>The provider sells the benefits of Skills for Life by explaining to the employer how it can be embedded into their employee's area of work.</p> <p>During the needs analysis process of an employer, if appropriate and if available, Union Learner representatives will be brought in to the discussions with the employer. The college has found that liaising with the Union Learner representatives and involving them in the process of establishing needs, has been key to its delivery of its Skills for Life targets as they are able to put the case to employers effectively.</p>

6.2 Overall assessment of similarities and differences between High Performers and 'Other' providers

In contrast to the high performing providers, a more mixed picture emerged from the telephone interviews with 'other' providers regarding Skills for Life. More of the providers who participated in the telephone interviews openly admitted to having struggled with Skills for Life to date e.g. Skills for Life 'has not been terribly successful'. Whilst one of the high performing providers had struggled to start with in this area (as outlined above), it had found a solution through working with a specialist organisation. To date a couple of the 'other' providers had not really been engaged in delivering Skills for Life or had only just started to deliver. Some are trying to embed Skills for Life whilst for others it remains separate.

Nevertheless a few of the 'other' providers had exceeded their targets for Skills for Life. Interestingly, one provider stated during interview that it pitched Skills for Life as its Unique Selling Point and that all their learners were offered Skills for Life. The provision was also introduced by the sales team when visiting employers. This provider also had separate Learning Advisers to teach Skills for Life which was generally taught separately to the NVQ. One 'other' provider who had exceeded their Skills for Life targets used an embedded approach by integrating it in their NVQ work. One provider, however, who was successful in delivering large volume of Skills for Life had prior experience in delivering similar provision through its Learn Direct contract so was experienced in this area. It had a Skill for Life strategy and used 'Super Assessors' who were assessors and also delivered Skills for Life. Ultimately, all its assessors were trained up to be 'Super Assessors', it also contextualised its Skills for Life work e.g. it is integrated into First Aid, for example.

7.0 Criteria for Success

The study also explored the key factors that have contributed to high performing providers' success in Train to Gain and what worked well in relation to their delivery model and not so well. It also explored key lessons learnt as a result of delivering their Train to Gain provision and areas that they would like to improve in the near future.

This section presents the key findings.

7.1 What works well in relation to high performing providers delivery model

In terms of what worked well in relation to high performers' delivery models, several referred to the aspects of **the way in which they worked with employers and their employer responsiveness**. For example, one provider cited the way in which its recruitment team discussed relevant qualifications with the employer at the outset of the organisational needs analysis process which avoided confusion at a latter stage. A couple also highlighted their employer responsiveness in relation to tailoring their provision to the client's need.

Another theme to emerge from our discussions related to **their staffing complement**. One provider highlighted this from the perspective of processes and roles and responsibilities i.e. the provider had a manual outlining the responsibilities for each person which related back to their strategic plan. One emphasised the ethos of its team members to deliver a standard service. Others also highlighted the **flexibility of their staff** in delivering a service to meet employer needs, the **focus and knowledge of staff** involved in Train to Gain (the qualifications of those involved in delivering Train to Gain for one provider are higher than staff working on its other contracts) and the dedicated support function which one provider has through its LSTAs.

For some consortium leads, their **partnership approach** was important with emphasis placed on a strong commitment to partnerships to deliver to the same standard. Other individual aspects mentioned include: the **quality assurance process** brought in to manage working with subcontractors, refraining from a '**one size fits all**' and '**one stop shop**' approach. They also stressed the importance **of trust**, ensuring that every learner had an ILP.

7.1.1 What works less well...?

In relation to aspects of the Train to Gain provision that worked less well for the high performing providers, these varied accorded to the individual organisation. For example, for one provider, the speed of its growth meant that individual members of the team were stretched. For another provider, an FE provider, what worked less well was not having a cross college CRM system.

The areas which worked less well for the 'other' providers interviewed included: sector compacts, the view that Train to Gain was poorly conveyed to employers in the media, the 6 months completion requirement which they felt was unrealistic, Skills for Life, the need for a more whole

college approach, having assessors who also work as college tutors, and the need to improve short term targets.

7.2 Overall assessment of similarities and differences between High Performers and 'Other' providers

The providers participating in the telephone interviews were also asked to state what they felt worked well about their delivery model. Some focused on **employer engagement** e.g. one provider had a multi-lingual assessor team which was vital to engage with the employers and the learners it works with. Others mentioned aspects of their work in relation to the relationships **with learners**. For example, one provider ensured that learners had a 24 hour contact in their area who was their mentor/assessor which helped retention. Some seized on **organisational aspects** such as having a whole college approach, a consortium model ensuring breadth of provision, and an application process that works well for providers wishing to join a consortium. A couple highlighted having **dedicated staff** roles and the **flexibility** of their delivery.

7.3 Key Factors that have contributed to high performing providers success

The high performing providers were also asked to identity their key success factors in relation to the delivery of their Train to Gain provision. The key themes outlined reinforced the main themes which emerged in relation to what worked well in terms of their own delivery as follows.

- **Staff/team** - a key theme was that of the **staff/team** that they had in place. For example, comments in this area included having a **strong team**, having **proactive staff** delivering a professional service, having a **dedicated team**, having **knowledgeable and competent** assessors and having the dedicated support roles for Skills for Life.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness** - another key theme was in relation to their **flexibility and responsiveness** to employer need and ability to adapt to change.
- **Partnership working** - the majority of lead partners of consortia cited aspects related to the theme of **partnership working**. One lead partner emphasised the importance of **building partnership relationships** with its consortium members. Another highlighted its **open and honest approach** and the importance of '**managing those partnerships and relationships effectively**'. This was echoed by another lead partner of a consortium which emphasised that it is easy to talk to and work with.

Other areas mentioned were around **experience, enthusiasm**, having a **clear strategic direction**, having **robust quality assurance/audit processes**.

7.4 Key Lessons for Successful Delivery

In relation to key lessons for successful delivery, most of the high performing providers emphasised the need to **be realistic**. For example, two providers explicitly referred to not over promising in terms of what can be delivered and one commented on the need to be realistic around length of stays i.e. how long a learner remains on their programme of learning.

Some providers mentioned '**learning lessons**'. For one provider this concerned learning lessons around **changing the culture** of their organisation, another was in relation to piloting of their aspects of their delivery. One provider simply mentioned the need to learn lessons in a general sense, stressing that providers had to be humble and that NVQs were hard to deliver and that providers have to be able to change.

A couple of providers mentioned **having good quality systems** in place. For example, the lead partner of one consortium had a number of its subcontractors go into administration during the first year of its contract. As a result, it realised it needed to have processes in place to ensure that such situations would not happen again on a regular basis so it brought in a Commercial Review as the first stage in the quality assurance process for bringing new subcontractors on board.

One provider suggested that to improve the likelihood of success **support and mentoring for newer/less experienced providers** could be put in place. This provider suggested having a pre Open and Competitive Tendering Round presentation to potential providers on what is actually involved in delivering Train to Gain. It believed that this would help improve the quality of submissions. The presentation would be delivered by a high performing provider with LSC colleagues at the pre OCT stage. A small number of providers could be involved in contributing to this on a rota basis. Successful providers could then be offered further support e.g. how to develop a partnership if delivering in a consortium; this might involve taking part in a mentoring arrangement with an experienced provider who would be paid for their time. The key would be selecting the providers to engage with new ones. This could be done on a pilot basis. The approach could even extend to peer mentoring providers who start to fall behind on their contracts to see if their underperformance can be addressed.

In terms of the lessons learned by 'other' providers, those cited relate to length of stay e.g. to not let the NVQ drag on; Learner Relationships e.g. case load reviews help; delivery methods e.g. the use of digital recorders helps; management e.g. careful management of providers in a consortium; employer engagement e.g. the need to employ the right staff to talk to employers and organisational structure e.g. the need to have more control over delivery.

7.5 Advice for 'Other' Providers

The study also explored with the high performing providers what advice they would give to others delivering Train to Gain provision. The emerging themes were linked to the themes outlined under the key lessons section such as:

- Being realistic and having a **realistic** strategy and targets
- Developing a '**business attitude**' to the delivery of Train to Gain
- **Flexibility** around what is being delivered
- Developing competency and capability in an area; to do 'pockets' initially than try as opposed to delivering in every sector
- **Building long term relationships** with employers
- To try and make it a dedicated provision and not a hybrid (for FE colleges whose curriculum areas deliver)
- **Financial competence** - developing strong financial projections and business plan
- Quality assurance processes such as developing **strong contract management** processes for a consortium with regular reviews, regular contact and regular performance management and having a good quality approval procedure for bringing subcontractors on board

7.6 Key Challenges

The 'other' providers who took part in telephone interviews were asked to indicate the key challenges they faced in relation to the delivery of Train to Gain. Examples cited include:

- Charging employers for Level 3
- The poor knowledge of Skills Brokers
- The difficulty of delivering Train to Gain in rural areas and their targets
- Appointing the right staff in the region
- Getting new business
- Challenges around infrastructure due to growth in contract
- For the Business Development unit in a College; having the freedom to take on employer training without having to negotiate with curriculum areas
- Getting the balance right between Train to Gain and Apprenticeships (a couple cited preferences amongst adult learners for adult apprenticeships).

To some extent, there is some synergy between one or two points raised here and the advice of the high performing providers, primarily in relation to targets and the comment of one high performing provider about colleges making their employer responsive provision a dedicated provision.

7.7 Suggestions for the 'Route Map'

The final part of the discussions with high performing providers focused on their suggestions for what might be useful in terms of a 'route map' to act as a guide to Train to Gain providers in the East Midlands. Below are summaries of key suggestions made by providers around what an appropriate route map should include.

- ❖ **Emphasis on planning:** - have a strategy in place and a business plan underneath the strategy with smart targets, to have an operational plan underneath the business plan and to closely manage all of the above. The emphasis on planning was echoed by a couple of the other high performing providers who stated the need to have ‘a plan’ or a ‘clear sales and delivery plan’.
- ❖ **Outline of a Delivery Model:** delivery model to be presented as a flowchart where appropriate but with a detailed breakdown of information or a handbook behind each step; a flowchart with a complementary toolkit. Key features suggested include: outline of qualifications which can be delivered in the workplace; looking at staffing, looking at an organisation’s current work with employers, ensuring the support of the SMT and ensuring the exact needs of the employer are met.
- ❖ **Emphasis on Employers:** highlight the need to maintain relationships with employers and to deliver what the employer wants.
- ❖ **Emphasis on Best Practice:** a forum to discuss best practice. This idea was developed more fully in the suggestion of another provider who outlined the concept of a Best Practice Route Map which would be split into sections e.g. **Broker Relationships; Learner Relationships and Guidance; Employer Relationships and Guidance**. The sections could be broken down further e.g. under Employer Relationships there could be information on how to conduct a full ONA, what to look out for in a pre-vet etc. The map could also include a section on contract management e.g. how to contract manage subcontractors/providers – just with pointers to point people in the right direction. As Skills for Life is a key area, there could be a section on **Skills for Life** with pointers on the different ways in which it can be delivered etc. This provider also suggested that it would be good to have good examples of sector specific initial assessment tools.
- ❖ **Toolkit:** One provider suggested having a tool akin to its own Provider Information Pack which contains everything that a provider/sub contractor needs to deliver Train to Gain. This provider emphasised the importance of process and quality.
- ❖ **TQS:** The provider which has been accredited with the TQS felt the best approach would be for providers to go through the TQS standard as this will produce an individual action plan.
- ❖ **Emphasis on the ‘IAG’ Phase:** emphasise the ‘IAG’ function or phase which is the next step in the process (after employer engagement) where the employer’s and learner’s needs are brought together and the product is created. The provider believes this is the most underestimated part of the programme and is the part that has to be ‘meaningful’.
- ❖ **Local Benchmarking:** useful to know about other providers’ performance so organisations can assess their performance accordingly in the region. For example, the provider stated that, at the moment, if it were struggling in a particular sector, it would not really know why

i.e. whether it would be down to its performance as an organisation or whether external factors might be involved which could be indicated if other providers are struggling with the same issue. The provider mentioned 'local benchmarking'. This happens in Leicestershire with regard to Apprenticeships.

7.8 Suggestions of 'Other' Providers

The providers participating in the telephone interviews gave less detailed suggestions for the 'route map' than high performing providers. Nevertheless, they did put forward a number of suggestions. These included looking at **how to sell Train to Gain to employers**; how to **present SFL in a positive way to employers**; how to have examples of best practice and having guidelines for new providers around what is needed for a Train to Gain contract. As with the suggestion by one of the high performing providers, one provider suggested that the '**route map**' should be based on the **TQS criteria** and could perhaps concentrate on areas of the TQS where East Midlands' providers are receiving low scores.

8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section highlights the main conclusions arising from the research with a particular emphasis on the characteristics of high performing providers. It also makes a number of recommendations reflecting the findings of the research.

8.1 Conclusions

The ten high performing providers represent a balance in terms of organisational type (private training provider or FE College); delivery model (lead partner of a consortium or a single provider); and delivery volume (small, medium and large delivery volumes) indicating that it is possible to deliver Train to Gain successfully through different delivery models and scales. Their performance in delivering both their Level 2 targets and Skills for Life targets also illustrates that it is possible to perform well and consistently in both areas.

Although the delivery models amongst the high performing providers may vary depending on their organisational structure, type of organisation and delivery volume, they do share some common characteristics. On the whole, the majority of high performing providers had participated in the Employer Training Pilot prior to Train to Gain and have held Train to Gain contracts since the first year of Train to Gain. They have, therefore, had experience in delivering employer responsive provision over a consistent period of time and as some openly acknowledged participation in the ETP had prepared them well for Train to Gain. In addition, on average, the high performing providers with medium to large delivery volumes also hold Train to Gain contracts in other regions so have this experience to draw upon.

The Train to Gain teams of high performing providers are well structured and usually involve the four core functions of Leadership and Management, Employer Engagement, Delivery and Quality with clearly defined responsibilities. They have clear processes in place which support the delivery of their work related to Train to Gain. The high performing providers who manage consortia have clear and rigorous quality approval processes in place for choosing partners to join their consortia and then for monitoring performance thereafter. They also have a strong commitment to partnership working and manage their consortia based on the principles of openness, transparency and open communication. They are also supportive of their partners and support smaller organisations which may need assistance, for example, to improve their processes when they first join a consortium. The high performing providers are either able to cover a wide range of sector areas or have particular strengths in certain sectors or qualification areas. All of the high performing providers demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement illustrated by the changes they had introduced since first starting to deliver Train to Gain. Train to Gain is well supported within the high performing providers' organisations and links in with their other provision. For example, all of the FE Colleges within the sample have support at the highest levels within their organisations.

The high performing providers use multiple methods to source employer leads. The majority also work with large employers. Historical relationships with employers are also important to them with repeat business a key feature of their work. On the whole, the high performing providers have flexible delivery with half explicitly referring in their interviews to meeting the needs of the business at the forefront of their work. Efforts to meet the needs of the business are illustrated by those high performing providers which mentioned the bespoke provision they have developed e.g. a new qualification or the piloting of approaches they have undertaken with new employers. As well as emphasis on meeting employer needs, during the course of discussions, a business like attitude and commercial approach was evident amongst the high performing providers. Most of the high performing providers had developed Employer Engagement and Marketing Strategy documents related to their delivery with some having additional strategic documents in place such as a basic skills strategy.

In terms of delivering Skills for Life targets, the approach varies across the high performing providers. However, in contrast to the majority of 'other' providers participating in the telephone interviews, a common factor is that the majority of high performing providers have found solutions to delivering their Skills for Life targets and that they have the capacity to deliver in this area.

From the high performing providers' own perspective on what works well in relation to their delivery model, the key themes which emerged were the way in which they work with employers and their employer responsiveness; their staff and, for the lead partners of consortia, their partnership approach. In terms of key lessons for successful delivery and advice, the need to be realistic was a key theme. All the high performing providers put forward suggestions for the 'route map' which, in contrast to those of the 'other' providers, were much more detailed and demonstrated their knowledge and experience in this area of delivery.

8.2 Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the suggestions of the high performing providers in relation to the key lessons and advice for successful delivery and their suggestions for the 'route map'.

- A key theme emerging from the discussions with high performing providers, is that providers need to have strong financial competence and business planning within their organisations and, in line with this, to be able to set themselves a realistic strategy and targets in relation to Train to Gain. The recommendation would be for providers to ensure that their business planning processes are as effective as they can be.
- A further emphasis was placed by high performing providers on the need to build long term relationships with employers. The recommendation would be for providers to work on an ongoing and consistent basis to building their relationships with their client base.
- For the lead partners of consortia, there was a stress on the need to have strong contract management and quality assurance processes in place. The recommendation would be for the lead partners of consortia to draw on the best practice procedures of the lead partners in the high performing consortia to put in place strong quality assurance processes.

- Further to the suggestions of the high performing providers regarding the 'route map', we recommend that the Learning and Skills Council consider the development of a more detailed 'Best Practice Route Map' which would include sections on, for example, Broker Relationships, Learner Relationships and Guidance, Employer Relationships and Guidance, Guidance on Managing a Consortium with key hints or tips for providers. This would probably take the form of a guidebook.
- In addition, we recommend that the Learning and Skills Council considers utilising the experience of its high performing providers more directly as suggested above in a kind of 'peer mentor' role e.g. High performing providers could be asked to present to less experienced providers at a provider network meeting, for example, on what it is like from their experience to 'live a Train to Gain contract'.

Annex One: Profile of 'Other' Providers

Profile of 'Other' Providers

Provider	Type	Delivery Volume	Delivery Model	Profile	Length of Time Delivering TTG
1	PTP	Medium	PTP, Single Provider	National training provider 50 business centres 45 staff in East Mids	Delivering for 3 years [Year 1]
2	FE College	Large	FE College, Lead Partner of a Consortium.	Lead partner of a consortium of 20 providers Based in the East Midlands & East of England	Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
3	FE College	Large	FE College, Lead Partner of a Consortium.	College covers Lincolnshire & Nottinghamshire 550 staff overall Lead partner of a consortium of 15 providers	Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
4	PTP	Small	Private Training Provider, Single Provider.	Small training provider Only delivers TTG Delivering in East Midlands & some in West Midlands.	Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
5	PTP	Small	Private Training Provider, Single Provider.	Established 1999 Has contracts with 5 of the LSC regions including the East Midlands.	Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
6	FE College	Small	FE College, Single Provider.	Small to medium sized provider 120 staff overall Works in 4 regions	Involved in the ETP pilot, Delivering for 4/5 years.
7	FE	Large	FE College working with Partner	Established 1970	Involved in ETP pilot.

Provider	Type	Delivery Volume	Delivery Model	Profile	Length of Time Delivering TTG
	College		Providers.	Particularly serves South Leicestershire	Delivering TTG since 2006/2007.
8	FE College	Medium	FE College, Lead Partner of a Consortium.	Large 16-18 provider Predominantly does full time learning Lead partner in a consortium.	Involved in the ETP Pilot. Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
9	PTP	Small	Private Training Provider, Single Provider.	Has 20 Learning Centres, 5 have WBL teams Has contracts in several regions.	Involved in the ETP. Did not get a contract in the EM in Year 1. Started delivering in Year 2.
10	PTP	Large	Private Training Provider, Single Provider.	Formed in 2000 A Learn Direct provider from 2004	Started delivering in 2007/2008 [Year 2].
11	PTP	Small	Private Training Provider, Single Provider.	Set up by Newcastle College to deliver TTG, Apprenticeships and WBL in all regions.	Involved in the ETP Pilot. Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
12	FE College	Small	FE College, Single Provider.	FE College with 7/8000 students Borders the East Midlands, East of England regions.	Involved in the ETP Pilot. Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
13	PTP	Medium	Private Training Provider, Single Provider.	National organisation Cover whole of the East Midlands	Involved in the ETP Pilot. Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]
14	Fe College	Medium	Lead Partner of a Consortium	There are 4 partners in the consortium East Midlands, local focus on Northampton	Delivering TTG since 2006/2007 [Year 1]

