



>LSC

Leading learning and skills

the magazine

Winter 07/08

The Magazine of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for partners and people interested in learning and skills issues in the East of England

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Welcome to the Magazine

Welcome to the Winter edition of the Magazine. This bumper issue is packed full with news of investment in skills across the East of England and updates you on our activities and successes.



The Government has outlined a significant extension of the **Train to Gain** scheme, doubling the funding of the service as part of a massive investment programme announced by the Dept for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) which will see more than £11 billion a year invested in education, employment and training. And the **Value of Learning** campaign launched at the end of 2007 is designed to support the Skills Campaign by putting a figure on that benefit and encouraging people to invest in themselves and grow their income as a result.

A **regional briefing event** for providers and stakeholders set out the Learning and Skills Council's investment priorities to deliver learning and skills for 2008-2011. We talked about what this means for the East of England and that a cultural shift is needed in the way we talk and feel about learning.

We have launched the search for the nation's top **Apprentice and Employer of the Year 2008**. I encourage all employers of all sizes and all sectors of industry across the East of England to enter these prestigious Awards. Short-listed finalists will be invited to attend a regional awards ceremony on 9 May 2008 at the Radisson SAS Hotel at Stansted Airport and considered for the national competition.

In 2007 there were a number of **key events and activities** around the region to promote and launch learning opportunities for employers and individuals. We celebrated thousands of people benefiting from hundreds of projects supported with European Social Funding to improve their skills and employment opportunities.

And we update you on what has been happening around the region with examples of great partnership working and celebrations of success.

Caroline Neville
LSC Regional Director, East of England

the magazine

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Train to Gain gets double funding

Investment in employee skills training is boost for business in the East.

The Government has outlined how a massive extension of the Train to Gain scheme will offer bespoke skills brokerage and high quality responsive training to enable all employers to identify and then meet their skills needs.

The doubling of funding in the Train to Gain Service is part of a massive investment programme announced by Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills **John Denham**, which will see more than £11 billion a year invested in education, employment and training.

Since its launch in 2006, Train to Gain has helped more than 7500 employers and enabled over 20,000 employees to undertake training in the East of England. Just one call to the Train to Gain helpline gives employers access to an impartial and independent skills broker to help them identify their skills and other business needs, and source training from a range of available skills solutions to best meet those needs.

To enable every company to access appropriate training, the following major expansion to the Train to Gain Service has been announced:

- More funding will be offered for a broader range of skills. Part funding will now be available for those doing a second full Level 2 qualification and funding for Level 3 will be increased nationally. Skills for Life training will now be supported as a stand alone offer as well as part of a full Level 2 qualification;
- The funding cap to be lifted for the best providers, enabling them to do more business as their performance improves;
- A massive boost for SME management training - the budget has increased from £4 million per annum to £30 million per annum, which will support some 60,000 key directors and managers in around 42,000 companies over the next three years;
- The LSC's National Employer Service will be expanded, with additional account managers to help more of the country's largest national employers, while skills brokerage will also be extended to help provide even more companies with specialist support;

- By working closely with Jobcentre Plus through their Local Employment Partnerships, Train to Gain will support people who have been unemployed to secure employment with training and progression on to higher level skills;

- New compacts with each Sector Skills Council which will tailor Train to Gain to ensure it meets the skills needs of employers in each sector - and joint investment planning so that public and employer funds work together to boost skills and improve.

Skills Minister **David Lammy** commented: "Lord Leitch's report spoke of a partnership between the state, the employer and the individual. Today, in partnership with the business community and training providers, we set out our plans for the expansion of Train to Gain as a vehicle for creating a truly demand-led further education sector. To this end we have cut bureaucracy to make sure that those colleges and training organisations that can best meet employers' needs are able to expand to meet demand.

"I am delighted to see that businesses are recognising the importance of skills and they are rising to the challenge by investing more in the skills of their workforce. We've listened to employers to ensure that this extended programme is even more effective in offering training when and where they need it. In particular, the increased investment in developing the leadership and management capacity in our SMEs will build a sense of mission at the heart of our communities, making their companies more profitable.

Chris Banks, Chair of the LSC added: "Train to Gain is a revolutionary development in the way that we deliver services to employers and these changes will ensure that even more employers and training providers are able to work with Government to raise the nation's skill levels. The expanded Train to Gain Service will enable



employers of all sizes, in all locations and across all sectors to take the future of their business into their hands through access to high quality training advice and support. In this way, it will play a key role in reaching out to the one in three businesses that still do not offer staff any training - and so will in turn transform the nation's skills base, productivity and competitiveness between now and 2020.

Mr Surinder Gupta is the franchise holder of 16 outlets of the famous and globally-recognised Subway submarine sandwich shops. Mr Gupta's outlets, which employ more than 100 staff from a range of ethnic backgrounds, are situated across a number of counties, including Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire.

Mr Gupta said: "I was impressed with how the Train to Gain Skills Broker dealt so well with my requirements and put them into action. He understood what I wanted and very quickly found the training providers. Because of that I would expect to use the service again in the future."

For more information on Train to Gain, visit www.traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 387326.

**Our
future.
It's in
our hands.**

Alvin stresses The Value of Learning

The Value of Learning campaign is designed to support and underpin the messages of the Skills Campaign by demonstrating the long-term financial benefits of investing time and money in improving skills. Where the broader Skills Campaign demonstrates the more emotional benefits of learning, Value of Learning puts a figure on that benefit, expressing it in terms of hard cash.

Phase One of the campaign in November and December included adverts placed in national press, regional radio and radio community messages using the line, 'Investing a little time in training can grow your annual salary by £2000', and explained the financial benefits of investing in training and the benefits of learning.

In December media coverage was generated by the 'Grow Your Income' research which demonstrated that, as a nation, we currently invest a tiny proportion of our annual income in our own personal development. The LSC issued a press release using the research to encourage individuals to bank on themselves, invest in their skills and watch their income grow as a result.

This release was issued to the media in December and in conjunction with the LSC's consumer spokesperson and popular financial expert, **Alvin Hall**, conducted broadcast interviews promoting the financial benefit of growing yourself and commented on the findings from the Grow Your Income media release. This activity generated extensive coverage across the UK with 22 radio stations running interviews with Alvin - reaching over 2 million listeners across the country. In addition, Alvin made a guest appearance on BBC News 24 and Sky News and the story continues to be picked up in the print media including the Metro. At the end of December the combined reach of this activity exceeded over 9 million.

For the final piece of activity with Alvin Hall, the LSC made a video feature in which Alvin gave an inspiring Christmas speech to camera, encouraging individuals to invest in themselves, as well as others. A link to the video is available from the Skills Campaign website www.lsc.gov.uk/inourhands. It was also released to other online media in the hope it would 'go viral' from there.



Our future. It's in our hands.

One of the best investments you can make is learning. This is because levels of qualifications can determine what you earn. The latest salary survey shows, on average, people with higher levels of qualifications earn £2000 to £5000 more than those with lower qualifications. Simply put, the more you learn the more you earn.

Exact payback varies, but invest time and money in qualifications and over five years you could earn £10,000 to £50,000 more. You may even be entitled to free training the first time you do Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications. For more information and to find out how to improve your skills call 0800 01 30 30 or visit lsc.gov.uk/inourhands.

Investing your money in learning can grow your annual salary by £2,000.

Phase Two of the campaign through to March 2008 will consist of developing a regional toolkit to cascade the message at a local level, helping colleges and regional LSC offices to drive up demand for course places during the critical course sign-up period. The creative execution for the campaign is using a take on the 'hands' theme and a money tree.



The Learning and Skills Council East of England held a strategic briefing event for regional providers and stakeholders in Cambridge recently, setting out its investment priorities to deliver learning and skills for 2008 - 2011.

The briefing began with **Mark Haysom**, Chief Executive of the LSC, talking about the Government's ambitious investment plans for the skills and learning of the country followed by **Caroline Neville**, Regional Director for the LSC East of England.

Commenting on the Government's plan to help boost the Nation's job prospects, Mark Haysom, said: "We want to reach out to more businesses and more people, to give them the skills they need. This year we are ramping up our focus on people who are not in work. We want to give them the skills they need to break out of the vicious cycle of unemployment and poverty. And we won't stop there. We want more people to progress in learning - gaining the skills they need to prosper in their chosen careers.

"These ambitions will not be met without radical changes to the Further Education system - ultimately purchasing power must rest with learners and employers.



Mark Haysom LSC Chief Executive

LSC sets out investment priorities to deliver learning and skills for 2008 - 2011

To do all of this, the Further Education system must make sure that those who can afford to pay contribute more to the cost of their learning, freeing up resources that we can focus on those who need it most."

Caroline Neville talked about the LSC Statement of Priorities and what it means for the East of England. Launched on 16 November 2007, the Statement of Priorities sets out the LSC's investment priorities for the FE system to deliver learning and skills for learners and employers in England 2008/09. She informed delegates that: "Skills open up opportunities for thousands of young people, adults and employers and have the power to change lives. We want people to recognise that their investment in learning is an investment in their future earnings.

"What is needed is a cultural shift in the way we talk and feel about learning. The five year marketing campaign 'Our Future. It's in our hands' is designed to help shift attitudes positively to learning and skills."

A major investment programme for the skills and learning of the country has been unveiled by the Government. Over the next three years more than £11 billion a year will be invested in education, employment and training initiatives for young people and adults to help boost the country's job prospects.

Over the next three years total spending on learning and skills will rise to £12.3 billion a year in 2010/11 - compared to £6.5 billion in 2001/02.

"We want people to recognise that investment in learning is an investment in their future earnings."

At the centre of the programme is a major expansion of apprenticeships with over £1 billion in Government funding to increase overall places from 250,000 today to more than 400,000 by 2010/11, provided high quality employer places are available. Achieving these figures in this timescale would deliver the challenges set by Lord Leitch in his review of skills almost 10 years early.

For the first time, funding will be targeted specifically at expanding apprenticeships for adults aged over 25. This will mean 30,000 additional such apprenticeships costing £90 million over the next three years.

All apprenticeships for those aged over 19 will total 125,000 by 2010/11 alongside 281,000 apprenticeships for those aged 16-18.

The Government was setting out its priorities and funding for the LSC, outlining the first stage in its longer term strategy to meet the challenges set out by the Leitch review of skills.

To support these initiatives, the Government also announced it was making available over £2 billion by 2010-11 to help build world class and sustainable education facilities to support this programme.

Mark Haysom concluded: "We welcome the increased investment in learning that will give more young people, adults and employers the skills they need to succeed in work and life."

You can find out more on the LSC Annual Statement of Priorities by logging onto <https://www.lsc.gov.uk/aboutus/lscstrategy/statementofpriorities>

LSC launches fifth annual Apprentice

LSC East of England launches search for Apprentice and Employer of the Year 2008

The Learning and Skills Council is searching for the nation's top apprentices and employers with the launch of the Apprenticeship Awards 2008. Employers of all sizes and all sectors of industry across the East of England are encouraged to enter these prestigious Awards.

The Apprenticeship Awards are held annually to celebrate the success of apprentices who have made a real difference to their future and to the organisation they work for. They also recognise the work of employers who are successfully tackling skills shortages to build their future workforce through Apprenticeships.

Employers are eligible to enter one of four categories depending on their company size; Micro (1-9 employees), Small (10-49 employees), Medium (50-249 employees) and Large (250+ employees). They are assessed on a number of criteria including implementation of the Apprenticeship programme, clear demonstration of the way Apprenticeships have benefited their business and the level of support provided to their apprentices.

In addition to the employer Awards, there are four categories open to apprentices - Apprentice of the Year, Advanced Apprentice of the Year, Young Apprentice of the Year and Personal Achiever of the Year.

Caroline Neville, Regional Director of the Learning and Skills Council, East of England said: "Apprenticeships are crucial in responding to the nation's skills shortage. They supply businesses with the skills they need for a secure future, stimulate innovation and bring with them a fresh boost of enthusiasm. An Apprenticeship offers first class training and qualifications, and practical skills which are valued by employers. Thousands of businesses across Britain have benefited from the Apprenticeship scheme and are reaping the rewards from training an apprentice.

"The Apprenticeship Awards are a wonderful opportunity to showcase businesses and individuals in our region for who an Apprenticeship has made a real difference to their lives."

Today, more than 130,000 employers across the country are using Apprenticeships to improve their business performance, whilst giving talented individuals the opportunity to achieve their goals. The government has recently announced that there will be 500,000 new Apprenticeship places by 2020 so that even more employers and individuals can reap the benefits.

Short-listed finalists will be invited to attend a regional awards ceremony on 9th May 2008 at the Radisson SAS Hotel at Stansted Airport and their names considered for the national competition.

To enter the Awards, or for more information, visit apprenticeships.org.uk/awards or call 0800 954 8896. Deadline for entries is 29 February 2008.



Graham Brough, Area Director for the LSC Norfolk presents Fallon Southwell from Fitness Express with the award for Large Business Employer 2007.

Last year's winners include **Fitness Express** in Norwich, who won the Large Business Employer of the Year Award 2007. Managing Director Dave Courteen said: "The Award is a great testament to the commitment we have made as a business to the training and development of our staff. The Apprenticeship scheme has been very successful for us, providing us with high quality staff who feel supported and encouraged to achieve."

Sam Harrison from Harpenden, Herts won Apprentice of the Year. Sam is currently working towards an NVQ Level 2 in Support Services, Healthcare and works at St Albans City Hospital. He said: "It was a great achievement to be awarded Apprentice of the Year and I feel proud to be congratulated for the contribution I have made to my team."

Gemma Roe from Lowestoft, won Personal Achiever of the Year 2007, said: "I have overcome so much in the past year and never thought I would have landed my dream job in childcare - but the Apprenticeship allowed me to do just that. The award was a complete surprise and I was really touched to think that I have made so many people proud by what I have accomplished."

ship Awards



Apprenticeships On-Line in Cambridgeshire

A new website has been launched in Cambridgeshire to help people search and apply for Apprenticeship opportunities across the county.

National and local training providers will advertise their Apprenticeships on the site and it will offer a free service to employers, allowing them to advertise their Apprenticeship vacancies. The website is aimed at young people aged 16 to 24 who want vocational training and is easy to navigate enabling them to search and apply for positions on-line. There is useful information about Apprenticeships and applicants only need to complete a generic application form that can be used to apply for different Apprenticeship opportunities.

Apprenticeships On-line is an excellent resource for employers to recruit young people and as well as being free provides useful information such as business benefits, employer costs, and details on Apprenticeships.

The Government's annual investment in Apprenticeships is almost £1 billion and they have stated they want to double the number of Apprentices from 250,000 to 500,000 by 2020. This website will help employers find out about Apprenticeships and in turn provide more opportunities for young people.

All Connexions Advisers and some school careers staff across the Cambridgeshire area have attended training sessions to learn how to use and promote the site to potential applicants. All local LSC funded training providers have signed up to the on-line service and have also received training. Feedback so far from partners has been good. Comments include: "It will be useful to raise the profile of Apprenticeships", "It is a major step forward in careers information and a way of focusing students to this pathway efficiently", and "It will provide a wider understanding of Apprenticeships and what is available for students". Many have offered to link to school websites, advertise around the school and college and discuss at parents evenings.

Funding from the Learning and Skills Council Cambridgeshire, has enabled Connexions to develop the site: www.apprenticeshipsonline.org/cambridgeshire.

This new website is a pilot for the East of England and will now be the main route to search and apply for Apprenticeship opportunities across Cambridgeshire.

Apprenticeship Awards 2008: Key Facts

Categories:

- Apprentice of the Year Award
- Advanced Apprentice of the Year Award
- Young Apprentice of the Year Award
- Personal Achiever of the Year Award
- Micro Employer of the Year Award: *1 to 9 employees*
- Small Employer of the Year Award: *10 to 49 employees*
- Employer of the Year Award: *50 to 249 employees*
- Employer of the Year Award: *Over 250 employees*

Closing Date: Friday 29th February

Information and application forms available from:
www.apprenticeships.org.uk/awards or 0800 954 88 96

Regional Awards Ceremony:
Friday 9th May - Radisson SAS Hotel, Stansted Airport

National Apprenticeship Awards Ceremony:
Thursday 10th July - Royal Horticultural Halls, London

What makes a winner?

The Apprentice of the Year Award seeks to acknowledge and celebrate apprentices exceptional contributions to their workplace. Judges are looking for apprentices that make a real difference to the organisation they work in by going beyond everyone's expectations and delivering measurable benefits.

The Young Apprentice of the Year Award seeks to acknowledge and celebrate young learners' exceptional achievements during the two years on their Young Apprenticeship. Judges are looking for entrants who have made the most of their time on the programme, and those who can clearly demonstrate considerable progress both personally and in their studies.

The Personal Achiever of the Year Award seeks to acknowledge and celebrate apprentices who have successfully overcome barriers or obstacles, personally or in the workplace, to achieve their goals and exceed all expectations. Judges are looking for inspirational stories of apprentices' exceptional achievements.

The Employer of the Year Award is designed to acknowledge and celebrate employers commitment to developing their workforce through Apprenticeships. Judges are looking for employers that can clearly show the benefits they have gained from a commitment to training their workforce through Apprenticeships.

Train to Gain Case Study: Lola Group, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire

Training - the vital component

Lola Group is a globally recognised supplier of specialist technology, services and advanced composites to a range of sectors including motorsport, aerospace, marine and defence.

Operating in these extremely competitive and innovative industries, Lola is keen to ensure the services and products it delivers are of the highest standard. A large part of this commitment involves having a happy, motivated and rewarded workforce, which can operate effectively and efficiently. For the past few years the company has used Train to Gain to help it achieve and maintain this.

Train to Gain has funded almost three quarters of Lola Composites production workforce to undertake training at NVQ Level 2. Most of these have enrolled on one of four programmes, each designed to be highly applicable to their role within the production process. Learners are trained on the job, with the instructor coming into the workplace to observe current working practices and advising how they could be improved and, just as importantly, praising good work.



Ian Handscombe is Production Manager at Lola Composites and manages many employees who have taken part in Train to Gain funded courses, with 11 more currently undergoing training.

He said: "We have a real mix of experience at the company, with some employees having been with us for as long as 20 years and others new recruits, but the courses have had a positive and noticeable impact on all of them. With new staff, the training improves their confidence and allows them to progress at a faster rate. It also means they receive a guided introduction to areas of production they may not have worked in before. For our longer-term employees, the courses act as a refresher for how things should be done correctly."

Ben Fihelebon has been a pre-preg laminator technician at Lola Composites for 10 years and took part in the Pre-impregnated hand lay-up NVQ Level 2 course which finished earlier this year. He said: "It's nice to get some formal recognition for the job I do, and the certificate to show I can do it to a high standard. The course has made me better informed about why we do things in the way we do, and it's given me a greater understanding of areas that are linked to my job, like health and safety."

Ian said: "The training has been well received by staff, they really appreciate the chance to learn and gain a qualification. We held a presentation for the 30 staff members who completed the training earlier this year that the chairman attended, and it was a great way to show appreciation for their efforts."

The benefits to the business as a whole have also been noted. There has been an improvement in staff turnover since the business has taken up the funded training, scrap levels in the production process have been reduced and the quality of the final product has increased.

Ian said: "From a business point of view, it's great that the trainer comes to us and that means there is very little downtime. Staff are still being productive while they are being trained, which is important when you're training quite a number of people at once."

Employees at all levels have undertaken training through Train to Gain, including Ian who has completed a Team Leader Level 2 NVQ. He said: "Like my staff, I learnt a few things and also received a lot of praise for the things I was doing correctly, which was a real boost."

Lola sees training its employees as a vital component of its wider commitment to staff and to the business as a whole. "If we don't keep training and innovating, the business is going to die. We're a relatively small company and we need to constantly bring new people through and re-evaluate our practices to remain competitive.

"Taking part in Train to Gain is a bit of a no brainer really. We've received good quality training for our staff at no cost to us - it can only benefit the company."

Train to Gain is designed to help businesses get the training they need to succeed. A Train to Gain Skills Broker will review your

"Taking part in Train to Gain is a bit of a no brainer really. We've received good quality training for our staff at no cost to us - it can only benefit the company."



Skills Brokers experience benefits of training first hand

Ensuring your workforce is well-trained is vital to business success. That's the message that Train to Gain Skills Brokers have been telling companies across the East of England since the initiative was set up last year. Now they can deliver that message with even greater authority as, practising what they preach, 22 Brokers from the region have gained degree-level qualifications in Business Advice.



Laurie Kay (front) with Skills Brokers

business, carry out a free skills analysis worth £500 and suggest a range of training solutions tailored to your employees. They will also recommend a training provider or a college who can deliver the training package for you. Your Train to Gain Skills Broker will explain all the funding options available, provide support at every step and review how the training is progressing for you and your employees.

If you would like to find out more about how Train to Gain can help your business, visit www.traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 38732.

Among the Brokers to attain the standard was **Gerald Barc**, who has worked for Train to Gains skills brokerage The Consultants Home Counties (TCHC) for just over a year and advises businesses in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Essex. Before this, he worked as a deputy managing director for a large international company and also owned his own business.

He said: "Having worked in business for over 30 years, I have a good idea of what makes a company successful. The NVQ actually has changed the way I do my job. I feel able to offer a more rounded service to the business managers and can advise on a wider range of business matters, which obviously makes the experience all the more valuable to them and their companies. Having a broader knowledge base of business advice, I can ensure that the solutions I suggest really fit the bill."

Also attaining the standard was **Becky Morgans**, who has worked for Train to Gains skills brokerage The Consultants Home Counties for just over a year and advises businesses in Norfolk, Suffolk and North Cambridgeshire. Before this, she managed a chain of health clubs.

She said: "Although I have lots of business experience, I didn't come from a business advice background. I knew my job well beforehand but the course has given me a more well-rounded approach to my work. I now have a wider knowledge of all the training solutions available to businesses, and thus can advise business managers more effectively and efficiently, usually on the spot."

Skills Brokers who gained the NVQ Level 4 qualification were invited to a celebratory lunch in Newmarket where the LSC's Regional Skills Director **Laurie Kay** presented them with their certificates.

Laurie said: "It is important that we are seen to be leading by example on investing in training, but it's also something we strongly believe will improve the performance of Train to Gain. Training staff is a really effective means of plugging any skills gaps, which exist in any and every organisation, including ours. The right training can make employees more effective and happy in their current roles, make them progress more quickly and take on more responsibilities and ultimately impact on the business performance as a whole."

For more information on Train to Gain, visit www.traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 387326.

Rising Stars shine at Bedfordshire and Luton Business Awards



New Age Training - Winner of LSC sponsored Champions of Learning Award. From left to right: Ray Stubbs, Darshan Obi, Mike Slough and Suzie Webb

A black-tie event celebrated Bedfordshire and Luton's star performers. The Rising Stars Business Excellence Awards is now in its fourteenth year and the ceremony was compared by BBC sports presenter Ray Stubbs. In all there were 12 categories with New Age Training the winner of the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton sponsored Champion of Learners Award.

Suzie Webb, Area Director for the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton, said: "Premier Newspapers and The Chamber have been working together with the LSC to make this evening possible. As in previous years the standard has been extremely high and I understand the judges decision in choosing some of the winning entries was not an easy one.

"The evening is a great opportunity to celebrate and promote the success of everyone's achievements and to hear the stories of both individuals and organisations that are committed to improvement through training."

Mike Slough, Director from New Age Training Ltd was delighted to be presented with the LSC sponsored Champions of Learning Awards.

He said: "It was great hearing Ray Stubbs announce that New Age Training had won the award and that we were the outright winners hitting every criteria in that category." He went on to say that he would like to say thank you to Ali Dyer of A:Live

Communication for nominating them for this award.

New Age Training Ltd (NAT) were established in 1995 to provide training opportunities to people over the age of 16 years, either employed, unemployed or economically inactive, in the application of information technology and other business related subjects. In the last two years, directors Mike Slough and Darshan Obi have successfully managed a period of rapidly expanding activity. They have now added Skills for Life, programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD), Assessor and Verifier Awards and community enrichment projects to their existing portfolio.

This period of expansion also saw NAT take over the management, development and delivery of 'The Mayflower' project. This innovative programme provides eligible young people aged 16 - 25 who have

learning difficulties and/or disabilities the opportunity to study in their home locality. Until the inception of the Mayflower project a young person with a special educational need was offered only limited local learning provision or a residential college many miles from where they lived to develop the skills they need for adult life. Mayflower provides an alternative opportunity for quality learning in their local community where they can practice their independence skills where they need to use them.

A parent of a learner who has taken part in the Mayflower project comments: "I can say without any reservation that the course is proving more suitable for Matthew than ever I had dared to hope. He is making friends, acquiring new skills and greatly enjoys going to college. I particularly like the fact that the Mayflower monitors Matthew's progress to ensure the suitability of his placement."

The matrix Standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers

information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work. The latest matrix Standard Review (March 2007) confirmed NAT's commitment to championing the power of learning. Two learners stated that their experience at New Age Training had changed their lives and described levels of support well beyond the provision which might be

expected from funding.

Darshan Obi commented that: "New Age Training is committed to the concept of life long learning and the ethos that education and training are empowering and life enhancing. This has been applied to the process of enriching the lives of learners and to the development of a highly skilled, confident and enthusiastic group of staff."

You can find out more about the Mayflower project by logging onto: www.mayflower-online.org.uk

Two learners stated that their experience at New Age Training had changed their lives.



Strong rise in the number of college students in Norfolk

Following the Government announcement that young people will be required to stay in education or training until they are 18, figures have been released that show the number of 16 and 17-year-olds choosing to stay on in education or training in Norfolk has risen five per cent faster than the national average for England over a three year period.

A new study by the Learning and Skills Council and Norfolk Children's Services has found that 1,800 more of Norfolk's 16 and 17-year-olds chose to stay in education in 2005 compared with 2002. This represents a seven per cent rise in this time compared to a two per cent rise across England.

The study also concluded that when figures from 2006 and 2007 become available, they are expected to show that Norfolk will have made further progress. In 2002, Norfolk's participation rates in post-compulsory education stood seven per cent behind the English average. However, by 2005 the gap had narrowed to just two per cent, and it is hoped that Norfolk will be at or around the national average for England when results for the last two years are published.

Graham Brough, Area Director for LSC Norfolk, said: "Working with our colleges, training providers, schools and other partners, we have been really successful in recent years in tackling what has been a long-standing and persistent problem in Norfolk. Too few young people have in the past continued in learning or training when they left school at 16 - especially when compared to many other parts of the country.

"But the local economy has changed and is continuing to change. We've responded to that, adapting the educational offering in Norfolk to suit where the county is today and where it's going, and this has been central to the rise in the number of 16 and 17-year-olds choosing to stay on in education. We're reaching a wider range of young people by providing them with unprecedented choice in education and training that is relevant to them and giving them support to help and encourage them to make the most of the opportunities open to them."

LSC Norfolk has identified four key themes that they believe are largely responsible for the marked increase in the number of young people staying on in education and training. These themes are:

- **Catching them young** - by working with 14 to 16-year-olds and making a range of flexible learning options available that offer them a more natural progression into post-16 education, young people are caught before they drop out of the education system and encouraged to keep learning
- **Creating choice** - new courses have been developed to run alongside the traditional curriculum which not only recognise, teach and reward a wider range of abilities and skills but will allow the students to have a wider choice available to them when considering their careers
- **Encouraging hard to reach groups** - targeting socially deprived areas or disengaged young people and considering how best to tackle the problems they face in staying on in learning and boost self esteem and confidence
- **Overcoming practical barriers** - tackling barriers to learning for all young people, including accessibility, transport, rural locations and flexibility.

Graham Brough said: "The figures put Norfolk in a great position to respond to the Education and Skills Bill announced recently. Obviously more young people choosing to stay on in education or training now means that the task will be so much less when it becomes compulsory for 17-year-olds in 2013 and 18-year-olds in 2015.

"We're certainly not resting on our laurels however. While it is great news that we have closed the gap, we don't just want to be reaching the national average but exceeding it. LSC Norfolk will continue to work with every college, work-based learning provider and school sixth form as well as organisations such as Children's Services and Connexions to ensure that we make learning as accessible as possible to the county's young people, in order to give them and Norfolk as a whole every chance of success."

Fred Corbett, Deputy Director at Norfolk Children's Services, said: "The view of Norfolk as an area of low participation and one of low aspiration is based on statistics from several years ago and is clearly out of date. The recent analysis done by the LSC shows the remarkable improvement in the last few years. Many more young people gain five or more GCSEs at good grades than five years ago, they get much better support and advice and our colleges, schools and work-based trainers are providing a rich range of opportunities for them. This is a really good news story for Norfolk."

A 14 to 19 Plan was presented at a local conference for those involved in delivering education in Norfolk. The plan will review the progress that has been made in this age bracket and proposes how this will be built upon until 2010.

"...we don't just want to be reaching the national average but exceeding it."

2007

We take a look back at key events and marketing and communication activities around the East of England last year.



A busy year: Train to Gain; Skills Pledge; Level2 at 19; Skills Tour; ALG; ESF.

Employers

Train to Gain

Thousands of businesses in the East of England were offered a helping hand by Train to Gain with a roadshow tour of business centres and industrial parks throughout the region. Starting in September and lasting six weeks the roadshow promoted the benefits of training employees to businesses.

The Train to Gain roadshow from the Learning and Skills Council visited thousands of businesses in Hertfordshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire in Train to Gain SMART cars. Its aim, to encourage managers to give their staff appropriate training which will not only aid their personal development but also impact on the success of the business.

Paul Storey, Skills Development Director at the LSC East of England, said: "Many small and medium sized businesses have traditionally been put off training their employees because of the initial costs, but it really can pay dividends, not only on your bottom line but on morale, staff retention and acquiring and maintaining a competitive edge."

"Train to Gain makes it easier for managers to identify and address any skills shortfalls within their companies. Our locally-based skills brokers will carry out an audit of a business's training needs before suggesting practical solutions which needn't be expensive, or even cost the company anything."

Since it was launched in April 2006, more than 7500 businesses in the East of England have already opted into Train to Gain. The roadshow aimed to visit thousands more businesses in September and October with the sincere hope that most will recognise the benefits the service can offer them and their staff and sign up.

The retail, health and social care and construction sectors are among the targets in the East of England identified by the LSC as having a greater proportion of training needs and skills gaps that are impacting on their overall success. Other sectors the LSC particularly wishes to reach with its Train to Gain programme include engineering and manufacturing, hospitality and land-based industries.

"...it really can pay dividends, not only on your bottom line but on morale, staff retention and acquiring and maintaining a competitive edge."

Skills Pledge

UK Skills Envoy, **Sir Digby Jones** launched the Skills Pledge at an event in London in June before a visit to Hertfordshire to meet local employers to discuss their training needs and encourage them to sign up to the Pledge. More than 45 businesses from the East of England were among the first to make the Skills Pledge at the launch to support all their employers to develop basic skills and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications. Most recent to sign up are FE colleges in Hertfordshire.

For more information on the Skills Pledge visit www.traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 015 55 45.



Young People

Level 2 at 19 Campaign

The spring campaign aimed at increasing the numbers of young people achieving Level 2 by age 19 and raising awareness of the importance of obtaining a minimum set of qualifications.



The target audience were schools below the national or regional average for achievement at 19. A total of 98 schools were visited. Details of any of the young people that wanted further information were passed to the relevant local Connexions office.

There were three main calls to action; telephone, text and a new web portal at www.learnnow.org.uk

The main information piece was an IKYP (information to keep in your pocket). This device is extremely flexible and allows for a lot of information to be communicated in a novel and interesting way.

A direct mail campaign to selected parents supported the campaign in the region using the same dramatic colours and visual style as all the other promotional materials.

Adults

East of England Skills Tour

With 4.3 million adults in England - one in seven of the working age population - having no qualifications at all, the Learning and Skills Council took to the road in the region to encourage residents to improve their skills and take control of their future.

The Skills Bus toured 18 towns around the region over a period of four weeks from mid August supported by local radio and press advertising. The distinctive mobile exhibition centre enabled visitors to find out about the variety of courses available and whether they may qualify for financial help.

Training providers supported the tour with promotional material and some joined the exhibition centre to offer guidance and provide information first hand.

Our Future. It's in our hands.

Launched in July the national campaign is the first phase of an anticipated 3-5 year campaign and uses a variety of national and local media and includes a website and helpline. Its aim is to transform the way people think, feel and act about learning and skills. The campaign focuses on reaching adults and employers who may not traditionally learn or train their staff, directing them to the relevant services, funding and support. Partners are encouraged to adopt the Skills campaign messages, materials and strapline so that collectively the message about learning and skills will be clearer and stronger.

For campaign resources: call 020 7413 3400, e-mail skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk or www.lsc.gov.uk/inourhands and 0800 011 30 30 for information and advice on how to improve your skills.

Adult Learning Grant

In September Adult Learning Grant (ALG) was made available across England following a successful pilot in 28 areas including Bedfordshire and Luton during the academic year 2006/7. The weekly grant is designed to help adults studying full-time with the costs of learning.



Depending on assessment the grant pays up to £30 per week for full-time learners aged 19 and over who are studying for their first full level two or three, which is equivalent to 5 GCSEs or 2 A levels. The pilot campaign has proved to be a success with 93 per cent of ALG learners in Bedfordshire and Luton completing their courses (above the average of 85 per cent). And the roll-out has had an outstanding response from learners keen to take up this opportunity.



ESF

The Learning and Skills Council held various events around the region to celebrate the projects and individuals that have supported people into work, learning or to develop their skills in their existing jobs with the European Social Fund (ESF) 2000-2006 programme.



Bedfordshire and Luton £20 million of investment from the ESF has helped more than 18,000 across the county. The Event held at Whipsnade Zoo celebrated the success of investing £20 million of ESF monies across two programmes which both promote employment opportunities for all. The funding has supported more than 119 projects with co-financing money and 127 projects with Global Grants funding.

Cambridgeshire £13 million of investment from ESF has helped more than 11,000 people across Cambridgeshire with 13,000 beneficiaries due for completion in March 2008. To mark the success of the funding programme, LSC Cambridgeshire celebrated with a fun day event at the East of England Showground near Peterborough in September.

Essex £17.5 million of investment has helped more than 17,000 across the county. More than 150 projects have been allocated funding by LSC Essex. To mark the success of the funding programme, LSC Essex celebrated with a fun afternoon and awards presentation event at Towerlands in Braintree in October.

Suffolk £22 million of ESF investment has helped 15,000 people across Suffolk through 140 projects. Richard Howitt MEP was guest speaker at the celebratory event with awards presentations and showcasing of ESF projects at Suffolk Ski Centre in July centred around the theme of challenging barriers.



Learning and Skills Council sets out

The Learning and Skills Council Suffolk revealed its ambitions to ensure everyone in the county has the opportunity to gain a wide range of skills and qualifications at an event last November.

Substantial investment in high quality courses and facilities coupled with an emphasis on making learning more accessible, appealing and relevant will be at the core of the LSC's strategy to move Suffolk into the top 25 per cent nationally and encourage all employers across the county to train their staff.

The county's achievements to date and how this can be built upon in the coming years was the focus of the Suffolk Celebration of Learning and Skills event at Trinity Park. Around 100 guests attended, including Suffolk MPs, councillors, and education heads and governors, as well as the Chairman of the national LSC Chris Banks.

They heard how Suffolk has enjoyed one of its best years ever in terms of learning success, with the opening of University Campus Suffolk,

greater numbers of young people moving into further education and training after school than in any previous year and more students achieving at least five GCSEs at A* to C grade than ever before.

And they were told that hundreds of millions of pounds of investment will be ploughed into Suffolk's education sector in the next five years, which will help deliver new facilities, courses and initiatives.

Judith Mobbs, Area Director of LSC Suffolk, said: "Everyone involved in learning in Suffolk has a right to be proud of the county's educational and training achievements. Suffolk faces some real challenges to meet the needs of its change in economy and providing the means for Suffolk's people to make the most of the opportunities on their doorstep is good for the individual and good for the success of the county."

"...ensuring Suffolk's workforce has the right skills will ensure the county's economy continues to grow and businesses will thrive..."

One of the initiatives the LSC is rolling out following the event is the Government-backed Skills Pledge. This seeks the commitment of employers to ensure their staff undertake training relevant to their jobs to at least NVQ level 2 standard, equivalent to five GCSEs, and to support employees to develop their basic skills

where needed, including literacy and numeracy. LSC Suffolk will ask all employers in the county to sign the Skills Pledge, and encourage them to see training as not

only an investment in their staff but in their company.

Judith Mobbs said: "We know that ensuring Suffolk's workforce has the right skills will ensure the county's economy continues to grow and businesses will thrive, and we now need to ensure we get this message across to employers across Suffolk. Without the support of Suffolk's companies and organisations, we can only do so much, which is why the Skills Pledge is so much more than a signature on a piece of paper."

The Suffolk Celebration of Learning and Skills event was hosted by Look East's **Stewart White** and many elements of the evening were provided by students from Suffolk colleges. Catering was provided by Suffolk New College, floral arrangements by Otley College, music upon arrival by a string quartet from King Edward School and there was a stage performance by students from Lowestoft College.

Other information revealed at the event included:

- The LSC will invest £43m in FE in Suffolk in 2007/08.
- At present, there are more than 20,000 learners in FE learning.
- There has been a 10 per cent increase in the number of 16 - 18 year-olds in college in the last year.
- There are currently more than 3,000 apprentices in Suffolk, with another 700 young people on entry-to-employment programmes leading into apprenticeships.
- £12.6m of funding for work-based training in Suffolk has been made available in 2007/08.
- Last year 6,869 adults in Suffolk gained literacy and numeracy skills and qualifications from adult learning programmes.

For more information on the Skills Pledge and to find out how you or your employer can sign up, visit www.traintogain.gov.uk/skillspledge or call 0800 015 55 45.



its vision for Suffolk



Above: Judith Mobbs at the event in November.

Left: Host Stewart White

Below: String quartet from King Edward School



New Link-Ed initiative

Link-Ed, the Essex based organisation that combines the expertise of business and education to give young people a sound insight into the world of work, held a conference to launch the Essex Built Environment Initiative.

An event held at Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford in December saw presentations from students and business professionals. The conference provided an opportunity to find out about the wide range of careers for young people of all abilities in this area. And was an opportunity to find out about the new Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment.

Robert West, Consortium Director of Link-Ed said, "The government recognises the importance of developing our built environment for the benefit of future generations. This initiative is a real opportunity for education and business to work together to heighten interest from young people of all abilities, male and female, in the wide range of highly professional career opportunities available in this employment sector."

The conference - 'What are the key issues for engaging young people in the designing, creating and valuing of the built environment?' - was supported by a range of agencies, companies and educational establishments in Essex, Southend and Thurrock who have come together under the Link-Ed banner.

Link-Ed is a not-for-profit company established to link and manage education and business activities across the local authority areas of Essex, Southend and Thurrock. They are funded mainly by the Learning and Skills Council Essex with additional support from the East of England Development Agency and the European Social Fund. They also provide a network and forum in which business and education can co-operate to improve young people's understanding of the world of work.

For more details email tg@link-ed.org

Lowestoft College student wins Suffolk Further Education Awards

Katie Bullock, a student from Lowestoft College, has beaten off competition from across the county to be crowned the Suffolk Further Education (FE) Awards winner and lauded as an example to other learners.



Katie, 26, was one of four finalists in the Suffolk FE Awards announced in November. Run by the Learning and Skills Council Suffolk, the awards acknowledge the outstanding achievements of individuals who are participating in further education in the county. Four colleges within Suffolk nominated a student who has achieved success in further education, often despite personal challenges, and who is a role model to other students.

Katie joined Lowestoft College just over three years ago after attending an event run by the college with her sister, who was already a student at the college. Katie was a single mother with a toddler at the time and wanted to improve her prospects.

She said: "Being a single mother on benefits didn't suit me. I wanted to get a proper education so I could get a proper job, but I didn't have a lot of confidence in my abilities at the time. I spoke to a couple of teachers at the college and they convinced me that I could do well on the Business Administration course at the college."

One of the teachers she talked to was **Judith Riches**, who went on to be Katie's course tutor for two of the three years she attended the college. She said: "Katie came back to education after quite a long gap and it wasn't easy for her, being a single mother on little income, and yet she was a shining light in the classroom and a great student. I admire her industry."

Katie studied Business Administration at Level 2 and then Level 3 at the college where she learnt how to use computer programmes and to understand businesses processes and organisation. She also undertook work experience at the college's student services office. While she studied, her son David, now 5, was looked after by the college's childcare facilities.

Katie said: "The support and flexibility I was offered by the college made it possible for me to do the course. Just knowing the college could be flexible if I needed it made a difference."

Going to college has made such an impact on Katie's confidence that since finishing the course in the summer she has recently started a Foundation Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice. Accepting the place on the course meant moving home from Lowestoft to Blackpool.

Katie said: "I'm not the type of person to do anything like this, I didn't think I could do it. Going to college made me believe in myself and when I look at what I've done I think it's amazing!"

Judith Riches said: "Katie is the type of student who makes my job very rewarding. She proves that you can come to college with very little and have your eyes opened to the possibilities, and take them. We're very proud of her."

After her foundation degree, Katie plans to go on to do an honours degree in whatever section of criminology most suits her and then to pursue a career in a related field.

Katie said: "People think that someone in my situation has a lot on their plate already, raising a child on my own, but if I can do it, anyone can do it!"

Katie received a trophy and a £200 cheque at the LSC Suffolk event in November (see previous page).

Shortlisted students nominated as one of the best students in the county also received a trophy:

Rory Carroll, 19 from Clopton originally left education at 16 and got a job but quickly realised that to improve his career prospects he would need more qualifications. He decided to enrol on the Construction Multi Skills Foundation Level 1 course at Otley College where he found he had a natural talent for bricklaying.

Belinda Harrill, 21 from Mendlesham, began studying a year-long First Diploma in Business Administration at West Suffolk College at 16. She earned the grades to do a two year BTEC National Diploma in Business Studies. Belinda is now in her first year of doing a full time BA (Hons) degree in Business Management at the college and has shown an outstanding commitment to her studies.

Melanie Reynolds, 20 joined Suffolk New College at 16 to study for a one-year GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism. After completing the course, Melanie progressed to a two-year BTEC National Diploma in Travel and Tourism, which she completed last year. She is currently working full-time at the college as President of the Students Union, having been promoted from Vice President.

Norfolk Learner wins National Food Manufacturing Apprentice of the Year Award



"People like Craig demonstrate exactly why apprenticeships are so valuable to the industry."

Craig Riches (left) and Alun Lucas, his tutor at Poultec Training Ltd.

The very best in UK food manufacture were recognised in a glittering awards ceremony held at The Marriott, Grosvenor Square in London. Out of the record number of entries, Norfolk Apprentice, **Craig Riches** from Banham Poultry, Attleborough was overjoyed to be the winner of the National Food Manufacturing Apprenticeship Award 2007.

Craig was delighted to be shortlisted for the Award and attended the event with his tutor, Alun Lane from **Poultec Training Limited**; Poultec Managing Director, Edward Bales and Peter Riches, Craig's father and himself a manager at Banham Poultry. On accepting the award, Craig said: "I have enjoyed the apprenticeship and it has really helped me to develop skills and further my career."

A record number of entries this year meant that competition was particularly tough and the shortlist included companies such as Schwans Consumer Brand and Grampian Country Food Group. It was with great pride therefore, that Craig received the

award as this year's winner of the Apprenticeship Award.

The judges were really impressed with the way Craig's career has developed and felt him a very deserving winner. There was good evidence of job progression in this entry - from part time forklift driver in 2000, to team leader when the apprenticeship completed. Said one judge; "It's great to see people reaching their full potential."

Chief executive **Jack Matthews** said: "People like Craig demonstrate exactly why apprenticeships are so valuable to the industry. Through his own hard work and commitment to learning new skills, he has

climbed the ladder to become a valuable member of the Banham team. We believe strongly that greater efforts should be made to encourage more people like Craig to undergo training in the workplace, which is why we have recently reformed the apprenticeship framework for food and drink manufacture. I'm sure Craig will continue to be a shining example of what can be achieved by doing an apprenticeship and I wish him all the very best in his future career."

Edward Bales of Poultec Training added; "It's great to see young people get the recognition that they deserve. Craig has worked exceptionally hard and so really deserved this award."

Sainsbury's launch Learning Zone for employees

A 'Learning Zone' for employees has been officially launched by Sainsbury's in their Dunstable Road, Luton store with an Open Day for all Sainsbury's colleagues to take a look at the bite size learning on offer to them.

The Sainsbury's Learning Zone, supported with funding through the Learning and Skills Council Bedfordshire and Luton, is designed to be open 24 hours so that colleagues can fit in learning around their shift patterns. Short courses on offer are non-vocational and are designed to encourage Sainsbury's colleagues back into learning as well as being an opportunity to de-stress after work. They will range from computing to craft, literacy to languages. A major advantage in providing a Learning Zone on site is that colleagues can do training in their own time before and after work and learn around their shifts at a time that best suits them.

Christine Allen, General Merchandiser and Union Learner Rep at Sainsbury's had experienced some training and wanted to give colleagues the opportunity to learn too. The Learning Zone has been set up with Chris's encouragement to support colleagues with their learning. Commenting on what Chris hopes the centre will do, she said: "I hope it will take away the fear of learning, and give others confidence through help and encouragement to try something new."

"I hope this centre will breakdown any barriers our diverse workforce may believe exist with this type of learning..."



Terry Eastcott, Sainsbury's Store Manager (top left) with Sainsbury's colleagues, Michaela Coan, Luton Adult Community Learning (top centre) and Chris Allen, Sainsbury's General Merchandiser and Union Learner Representative (top right).

Sainsbury's are proud of their history in supporting colleagues with their learning. The tradition continues today and **Terry Eastcott**, Sainsbury's Store Manager, commented: "At Sainsbury's we aspire to be seen as a great place to work and a key part of that is an individual's opportunity to learn and develop to help them grow in the future.

"I hope this centre will break down any barriers our diverse workforce may believe exist with this type of learning and allow any of our colleagues to learn in an environment they are used to. The familiar surroundings should give them the confidence to try the courses on offer and in turn encourage their friends and family to look into doing the same."

Terry continued, "We had a number of colleagues enrol on a course last year off

site, but only a few completed their course as they found it a struggle to find a balance between learning and their workload. The centre should enable our colleagues to learn at their convenience with courses planned around their shift and without them having to leave the building."

With Sainsbury's it is not just a job but a chance to learn new skills and be part of a great team. Sixty per cent of the Luton store's employees do not have English as their first language, so Sainsbury's provides English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) support enabling them to communicate in and out of work.

The Learning and Skills Council Bedfordshire and Luton are pleased to be associated with such a venture. **Graham Moores**, LSC Director of Economic Development said at the launch: "It is important that employees are supported in their learning as research shows that a more motivated and stress-free staff means improved performance and less sick days so both individuals and the company benefit. The fact that the



employees are involved in determining what learning is on offer can only help in ensuring Sainsbury's colleagues take up this great learning opportunity. I hope the bite size courses are the first step to future learning and for them to achieve their full potential."

Luton Borough Council's Adult Community Learning is providing a varied programme of courses. They met with prospective learners on the open day to discuss the level and type of courses best suited to their needs and interests so that a programme of learning activity can be planned. Courses will take place on various days and times during the week so that learning is accessible to all including shift workers.

Lindy Lloyd, ICT Curriculum Leader at Luton Adult Community Learning said: "We are proud to be working in conjunction with the LSC, the trade unions and Sainsbury's to support the creation of a learning zone within their store in central Luton. It is an exciting opportunity, enabling us to bring learning into the workplace."

Left to right: Principals Elizabeth Rushton (West Herts College), Fintan Donohue (North Hertfordshire College), Mark Dawe (Oakland College) and Paul Harvey (Hertford Regional College).



Hertfordshire Colleges sign 'Skills Pledge' to support staff training

Principals of Hertford Regional College, West Herts College, Oaklands College and North Hertfordshire College - together employing more than 4000 staff - have signed up to the Skills Pledge.

The Skills Pledge is a voluntary, public commitment by the leadership of a company or organisation to support all its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2 (equivalent to 5 good GCSEs).

The purpose of the Skills Pledge is to ensure that all staff are skilled, competent and able to make a full contribution to the success of the company or organisation. Research shows that one of the keys to a productive, successful business is having a skilled and competent workforce.

"Committing to and signing the Skills Pledge is our public statement that we are prepared to invest in our staff."

Paul Harvey, Principal at Hertford Regional College, said:

"A key factor in guaranteeing our success is ensuring that all of our staff are appropriately trained for the jobs they carry out. Committing to and signing the Skills Pledge is our public statement that we are prepared to invest in our staff."

Fintan Donohue, Principal from North Hertfordshire College added: "We hope that many more employers in Hertfordshire will be making a similar public commitment to raising the skills of their workforce."

By signing up to the Skills Pledge the colleges will be able to access the network of skills brokers across England, managed and funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

Liam Sammon, Area Director for the LSC in Hertfordshire explains: "Skills Brokers are part of the LSC's Train to Gain Service and work with employers to understand their business priorities, help identify their skills needs and work with them to design a training package that will best meet those needs. I encourage any organisation to take advantage of this support and am pleased that Hertfordshire Further Education Colleges have taken the positive step of signing up to the Skills Pledge."

The Skills Pledge is open to all employers of all sizes in the private, public and voluntary sectors. For more information on the Skills Pledge, visit www.traintogain.gov.uk or call 0800 015 55 45.



Suffolk Colleges work with the LSC to promote FE in Suffolk

From left to right: Karen Taylor (Lowestoft College), John Nice (Otley College), Tracey Bailey (Suffolk New College) and Emmanuelle Durand (West Suffolk College)

Lowestoft, Otley, Suffolk New and West Suffolk College have joined forces with the help of funding through the Learning and Skills Council East of England to promote further education in Suffolk with the launch of a website.

Promoting an array of opportunities for students who are looking at the possibility of studying in the region, www.collegesinsuffolk.co.uk has links to all of the colleges in Suffolk.

The recent launch incorporated radio and bus advertising with students visiting the site and registering having the opportunity to win an iPod and a variety of other prizes in the future.

A spokesperson for the group, **John Nice**, Otley College, said: "Historically all colleges have been seen to work individually, therefore this group is really proud of the fact that they have been able to successfully work together for the benefit of learners in the region."

Judith Mobbs, Area Director for LSC Suffolk added: "Our priority is to ensure quality learning opportunities and by working together the colleges will be able to make many more people aware of the wonderful opportunities that are on offer at our colleges in Suffolk."

National Matrix for Essex CC

Essex Adult Community Learning Service has been awarded a national MATRIX Excellence Award for information, advice and guidance services. The award was presented at an awards ceremony at the Institute of Directors, in Pall Mall in November.

Essex Adult Community Learning Service is the only local authority service in the UK to receive this award in 2007 and the only provider in the Eastern Region. The

All aboard: LSC Norfolk launch Travel Plan

Most of the tenants from Broadland Business Park in Norwich in conjunction with Norfolk County Council have or are in the process of drawing up travel plans to try and increase the greener options of travelling to work.



As well as raising awareness of the effects on the environment of car pollution and congestion, car parking is very limited. The Learning and Skills Council Norfolk were amongst the first to submit their draft plan.

A car share road show was launched at the business park during travel/wise week with representatives of Broadland Business Park, The Highways Agency and Norfolk

County Council where staff could log on to a car share scheme. Also during that week other options such as the cycle 50% club and electric bikes were displayed.

The travel/wise week was held in Norfolk, South West, West Midlands, West Sussex and Worcester in September to promote sustainable travel in schools, the workplace and private residences.

Award

judges said they were inspired by the drive and passion of the Service, with staff that were full of ideas and enthusiasm in striving for excellence and making a difference.

The Matrix standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and guidance on learning and work.

For more information go to <http://www.matrixstandard.com>



Peer support at heart of equality and diversity

Flexible, engaging learning for all which removes barriers and understands different needs is a proven recipe for success, but in an ever changing world it can be hard to keep up with best equality and diversity practice. Providers in the East of England are getting together to support each other to address the equality and diversity agenda.

Regional exemplars

In a region-wide peer review project commissioned by the LSC, selected providers are set to become exemplars for good equality and diversity practice. Eight providers will be given specialist targeted guidance and practical support to raise their capacity for self improvement in equality.

Project manager and equality expert **Christine Rose**, says "The group will work collaboratively with active peer support at its heart. This will involve acting as a critical friend and sharing information, progress and problems." As well as developing awareness of the requirements of equality legislation, providers will be asked to identify a particular theme to develop, such as ensuring that the voice of learners from minority groups are captured and acted upon. Expert advice and consultancy support will be provided via a mixture of one to one visits, email and telephone contact.

The fruits of the project will be enjoyed by all, with a dissemination event in the summer of 2008 for all providers and LSC staff in the region to celebrate good practice.

Local action

The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton launched its Equality Development Group in November. **Lorna Wilkins** and **Craig Smith** from the LSC created the group as a local forum for discussion, practical support and action, with the membership reflecting the range of provision.

The group will consult local providers by sending out a feedback tool to gauge how equality and diversity issues are being addressed, explore challenges and to gather examples of good practice. This feedback, along with other available data and research will inform an action plan which the group will drive forward and monitor.

There will also be a chance to share expertise. Group member **Charlotte Puddifoot**, Equal Opportunities Co-ordinator at Dunstable College said "Equality and Diversity practitioners can be a bit isolated at times - it can be hard to know where to go to share ideas. Getting support from the group helps me to get others on board to raise the profile of equality and diversity in the college."

Group members stressed the need for partnership working. **Peter Martin**, representing Voluntary and Community Sector in Bedford, noted that "It is important to make sure that the voluntary and community sector is part of the agenda for equality and diversity." While Work Based Learning Network Manager, **Julia McNeill** said "We need to take a flexible approach. Small work based learning providers may need extra support when looking at equality and diversity issues. There is a real need for teamwork on this."

Sport for choice

Ipswich Town Community Trust produced an away victory when they won the prestigious 'Loving Learning' award for their project Sport4Choice at the East of England Celebrate Awards, held recently at The Cut, Halesworth.

The awards celebrate the achievements and difference made to peoples' lives by projects funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) over the past seven years.

The Sport4Choice project is funded by ESF through the Learning and Skills Council Suffolk and helps people in Ipswich who want to improve their reading and maths skills through sports-related activities.

Sacha Brakenbury, Learning Manager at the Ipswich Town Community Trust said: "We are really pleased to have won this award and be recognised for our innovative approach to learning. This project uses the motivational power of sport to engage and encourage learners who might otherwise not access a more traditional approach to education. The project uses high profile sporting venues including Ipswich Town Football Club home ground Portman Road and the National Stud at Newmarket to deliver sports-themed learning."

"...it uses the motivational power of sport to engage and encourage learners who might otherwise not access a more traditional approach to education."

Adult Education Tutor **Annie Brown**, also from the Trust added: "The project has helped people far in excess of those originally planned, including training some to work in sporting environments as adult learner support assistants."

Julia Barrett, ESF Contracts Manager for LSC Suffolk said: "ESF helps people who need additional support to enter work by helping break down barriers and develop their potential by training people who lack basic skills and qualifications."



Annie Brown from Ipswich Town Community Trust 'Sport4Choice' receives the Loving Learning Award from Laurie Heselden, Regional Policy and Campaigns Officer for the South Eastern Region Trades Union Congress

Norfolk Business join forces to put skills top of agenda

Business Leaders from across Norfolk are joining forces to ensure the county has a skilled and world-class workforce that is fit for the future.

To help put skills on the agenda, the Learning and Skills Council and Norfolk Chamber of Commerce are holding the **Norfolk Skills Conference** on 20 February at Dunston Hall near Norwich. Two hundred people, including company bosses, government decision-makers, entrepreneurs and experts from education and training are expected to attend.

Skills and aspirations have long been a concern among business leaders, and the size and rural nature of Norfolk presents challenges to training providers. The key driver for the event, run with economic partnership Shaping Norfolk's Future, is the Leitch Report. Published last December, the report examined the UK's long-term skills needs and sets out ambitious goals for 2020 to help make it a world leader.

Graham Brough, Area Director for LSC Norfolk, said: "The rate at which adults in Norfolk acquire skills will have to accelerate considerably if we are to meet Leitch's ambitions and those of local businesses. Our county currently compares relatively poorly with many other parts of the East of England in relation to the qualifications held by the workforce.

"If the challenges are considerable, then so are the opportunities. The Train to Gain Service is providing very significant funding to support employers and their employees to access Skills for Life, Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. Our further education and apprenticeship programmes provide more opportunities and our colleges are rolling out an ever wider range of foundation degree programmes. We have seen Centres of Vocational Excellence in Norfolk and one of the first National Skills Academies, in Financial Services, in central Norwich."

Caroline Williams, chief executive of Norfolk Chamber of Commerce said: "Our high profile conference will explore why the messages in the Leitch report matter, what they mean for Norfolk, and how we can ensure provision is made as accessible as possible for businesses, especially small and medium enterprises."

The key note speaker will be **Prof Mike Campbell**, director of development at the Sector Skills Development Agency.

For further information, e-mail margaret.read@norfolkchamber.co.uk or visit www.norfolkchamber.co.uk.

Equal Engage: Giving offenders a helping hand

The Tri-regional Equal Engage project identifies offenders who are committed to finding employment whilst they are in prison and offers intensive support on their release until they find work. Support workers will accompany them to interviews, liaise with probation (and a range of agencies) on their behalf and be there to help with any problems they might encounter, staying in contact as long as the beneficiary needs them.

In September Richard Howitt, MEP for the East of England visited the Equal Engage Project at NACRO and met an Equal Engage beneficiary. Five years ago at just 17 years old, Jay, 22, from Peterborough was about to start a long prison sentence for drugs offences.

Today, Jay is out of prison and has ambitious plans for his future, stating "Equal Engage has made a great difference to me. I've got a goal and plans now and I hope to be running my own gym business within five years."

The qualifications Jay gained in prison complemented the seven GCSEs he had when he left school and have given him practical skills that he can use to help get his dream job in the fitness industry.

Steve Snell is Jay's relay worker based at NACRO. He keeps in regular contact with Jay now that he is out of prison and seeking work. "Jay has been very proactive on the Equal Engage project and has taken every opportunity given to him. He is keen to continue studying sport and fitness and he has volunteered to take part in a project to integrate ethnic groups in Peterborough through playing sport," said Mr Snell.



Richard Howitt, MEP for EoE, Chris Harpin, Project Manager - EQUAL Engage (OLASS), LSC Hertfordshire, Jackie Wilson, NACRO, Manager Equal Engage and Jay, recently released from HMP Peterborough

Local learners join National Learner Panel

Two learners from the East of England have been selected for the National Learner Panel to help advise Government ministers on further education and training issues.

The National Learner Panel was set up last year by Bill Rammell, minister of State for Further and Higher Education. The Panel gives learners over the age of 16 a say in the development of further education at a national level which helps the Government, the Learning and Skills Council and other organisations make key decisions.

Graeme Brinded who works at the Norwich Mail Centre in Norwich has been selected along with Lynette Wieland from Management and Personnel Services Ltd (MAPS) in Luton to sit on the Panel.

Mr Brinded said: "I was surprised and pleased to be selected to join the Panel. I've always been interested in learning and I am currently working on my NVQ Level 3 in Advice and Guidance to enable me to teach lifelong learning courses. I also have three children at different stages of

education so I have a broad base of experience to bring to the panel."

Since taking up the post, Mr Brinded has been able to share his experience as a Union Learner Rep for the Communication Workers Union (CWU) with other members of the panel. At work, Mr Brinded provides course information and advice to colleagues about learning opportunities in their local areas. His commitment to learning has led to a national award for Learning and Innovation from the CWU and a Community Learning Award from Norwich City College.

Lynette Wieland, 18, is studying for an NVQ Level 3 in Business and Administration at her workplace, MAPS. She said: "I'm very pleased to have been appointed to the Panel. I'm particularly looking forward to supporting other work-based learners. We

will be reviewing the isolation sometimes felt by learners in full time employment and learner involvement strategies."

Bill Rammell said: "Involving learners in what we do is not optional. It must be integral to every aspect of learning; from decisions in Government, to college and provider management, to the classroom and workshop. We all have a role and a responsibility to ensure learning is guided by and responds to the needs and aspirations of all individuals in further education. My commitment, and that of my Department is to ensure the voice of learners is heard at the very heart of Government policy-making."

Panel members consist of fifteen learners aged 16 to 75 drawn from a range of backgrounds and learning settings from across the FE sector. The minister agreed that the Panel would be independent with a remit focussed on ensuring that the learner voice is heard at a national level and be able to influence policy design and delivery.

To find out more, go to www.direct.gov.uk/nationallearnerpanel.

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