

X factor not the key to a successful career

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Simon Cowell may be looking for the X-factor but most employers prefer people with qualifications. The popularity of reality TV shows has meant that many people now expect to find instant celebrity status instead of focussing on gaining skills that lead to a successful career. A report issued today by the Learning and Skills Council, *What has learning ever done for us? The impact of learning on London*, shows that gaining a qualification reaps its own rewards.

The report, based on extensive research of learners and employers over the past year, shows that London businesses are much more likely to recruit people with qualifications. The research shows that almost two-fifths of previously unemployed learners who achieved a full Level 2 and 3* qualification are now in work, compared to three in ten people who did not complete their courses.

Businesses are also willing to pay up to £3,000 more per annum to employees who have a full Level 2 or 3, than those without these qualifications. Other benefits to learners include more confidence and faster progression up the job ladder.

Learning is helping many people who are furthest from the labour market to come off benefits and gain employment. One Learner Tracker¹ survey showed that, of 2,679 unemployed learners taking a course to learn new skills, a third moved into employment; and one in five learners who had been claiming incapacity benefits moved into work.

Despite there being plenty of job vacancies on offer², London employers are finding it difficult to recruit suitably skilled staff from London's labour pool. And an increasing number of London employers are reporting that existing staff are not fully proficient in their current jobs. This is becoming a barrier to London's long-term competitiveness in the global economy.

Research shows that employers who are making use of publicly funded staff training programmes, such as apprenticeships and Train to Gain, are fast closing the skills gaps in their businesses. Other benefits to business include higher competitiveness, improved productivity and reduced staff turnover.

David Hughes, LSC Regional Director for London said:

"The result of this research backs up what we have always believed: it shows the positive impact that learning has on the lives of people and the success of businesses. As the new academic year kicks off it is a perfect time for Londoners to review their abilities and unlock their full potential by developing the skills employers need to compete successfully."

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Notes to editors

NVQ level 2 is equivalent to 5 GCSEs A-C. NVQ level 3 is equivalent of 4AS / 2 A-levels

Learning and Skills Council:

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

The report: *What has learning ever done for us? The impact of learning on London* is based on the following research reports available on www.LSC.gov.uk/London/publications.

1. Learner Tracker 2007/2008¹

The LSC has carried out four FE Learner Tracker surveys this year, with a focus on employability and progression into further learning of adult learners. The surveys involved a range of learners, across levels, gender, unemployed/employed and with/without previous qualifications.

- *Where are they now?* A follow-up to the pilot Learner Tracker study that looks at the long-term benefits of learning for 922 London learners, 18 months after the end of full Level 2 or 3 qualifications.
- *What's achievement got to do with it?* A survey of 2,400 full Level 2 or 3 London learners in three categories: complete and achieve; complete but don't achieve; and early leavers.
- *What is the impact of the Foundation Learning Tier?* A survey of 1,000 London learners who completed an Entry Level or Level 1 qualification. Skills for life courses were not included, but ESOL courses were.
- *Impact of Learning on Employability in London.* A survey of 2,679 London learners focusing on the impact of further education on unemployed adults.

2. National Employers Skills Survey 2007²: Key findings for the London Region - March 2008.

The National Employers Skills Survey 2007 (NESS) was commissioned by the LSC along with its partners, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Sector Skills Development Agency.

The purpose of NESS is to provide robust and reliable information on skills deficiencies and workforce development to serve as a common basis to policy development and assessing skills initiatives.

In total just over 79,000 employers were interviewed nationally. In London a total of 12,077 interviews were conducted for the main NESS study.

3. Train to Gain Employer Evaluation: Sweep 1 Research Report – May 2008.

Employers who had contacted a skills broker between January and April 2007 were surveyed during June and July 2007.

The research covered employers' satisfaction with the brokerage service, employers' satisfaction with the training and the impact of Train to Gain on the companies involved.