



>LSC

Leading learning and skills

the magazine

**Celebration of
Learning and Skills
Awards launch**

**One million adult
Level 2 milestone
exceeded**

MAY 2007

The magazine of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for partners interested in learning and skills issues in the North East.

Contents

May 2007

FOREWORD	3
CORPORATE	4-6
Partnerships in the North East pass the Diploma test	4
Regional Commissioning Plan	4
Framework for Excellence - Where we are today	5
One million milestone exceeded as government steps closer to reaching Leitch's ambition	6
Half a million young people earn while they learn	6
More young people achieve key qualification level	6
CELEBRATION OF LEARNING AND SKILLS AWARDS 2007	7-9
TRAIN TO GAIN	10-15
Jamie Oliver's cook on North East tour for LSC	10-11
Skills brokerage in the North East	11
Caring company looks after its own	12
Training brews at Tetley's	13
An immaculate training record	14-15
A responsive approach to training	15
INDIVIDUAL	16 -19
Anything you can do....	16-17
Here comes the entrepreneur	17
All change for bus driver Kevin	18
TV presenter encourages North East students	19

Cover picture:

Jeremy Dyck and Lissa Statham paid a visit to Stockton Riverside College to launch the LSC North East Celebration of Learning and Skills (CoLaS) Awards.

the magazine

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Foreword



Chris Roberts,
regional director,
LSC North East

Spring is a time for new hope and the LSC has a great deal to celebrate and look forward to. Read on and you will see that we exceeded our national targets in relation to Level 2 attainment with large increases in the number of adults and young people achieving that crucial qualification. But this is not just our achievement; the young people and adults who have achieved should also be very proud of themselves.

Here in the North East, we have just launched the Celebration of Learning and Skills (CoLaS) Awards, which will celebrate the achievements of learners and employers from across the region. These prestigious 'Oscars' style awards, which take place at The Sage in October, will showcase the achievement and progress being made in the North East. I have always believed that recognising and rewarding hard work, talent, creativity and individuality is a vital step in encouraging learners and employers to excel and stand out from the crowd.

We experienced a touch of Hollywood glamour when Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie look-a-likes helped us launch these awards, but we have also had our fair share of home spun celebrity help over the past months. TV personality, and former Blue Peter presenter, Matt Baker was in the region recently encouraging young people to get their qualifications. He was inspirational when he visited schools in the region to talk to students and teachers about his own experiences and how important it is to work hard.

The Train to Gain service has gone from strength to strength in the North East with record numbers of employers and individuals benefiting. We were lucky enough to welcome Jamie Oliver's school dinner lady, Nora Sands, to help promote Train to Gain to school support staff across the region. Nora visited schools and met with cooks, lunchtime supervisors, and caretakers to talk about Train to Gain and how it can help them achieve their personal and professional goals. As a result of this campaign, there has been a huge increase in the number of enquiries from schools interested in what the Train to Gain service can offer.

I hope you will enjoy reading about our recent successes and achievements and that our magazine has managed to keep you both entertained and informed. As always, I welcome any comments.

Opening up Communications Channels

In the past couple of years we've seen the North East undergo a huge amount of physical change. There's also a lot more development in the pipeline. So I now feel that it's time to focus more effort on the 'people side of things'. There's some great work that's already being done to put learning and skills high on the agenda, but I believe that there is still plenty more to get fired up about.

I'm proud to say that I am moving with the times and I am now 'blogging'. The concept of 'blogging' has been around for a little while now and I think it's a great way of opening up the channels of communication, and further expanding the audiences I can communicate with, on all the areas of importance to the LSC North East. Mixing traditional communication methods with new e-based methods means I can personally reach a much wider audience, no doubt covering a broader age range.

Despite the fact that about a quarter of internet users in the North East are already blogging, I'm sure there are lots of people who are still new to the phenomenon. In a nutshell a blog is an on-line diary.

So, since early January, I have been giving visitors to the LSC website access to my personal opinion on a whole host of topics with a learning and skills theme. My blog will hopefully help surfers understand what I'm passionate about.

There will be some people who find my views controversial. Others might not find them controversial enough. But what is important is that we get the learning and skills debate going.

Whoever you are, whether you are an employer, an employee, a provider, a parent, a learner or a teacher; please tell me what's important to you. Let's get under the skin of the learning and skills issues in the North East. Tell me what you think we are doing right. More importantly, tell me where you think we are going wrong.

Every week I throw a new topic into the melting pot. I give you my views and I invite you to share yours.

As this LSC blog is a fairly new idea I don't know where it will lead, but let's share our thoughts and aim to make a difference in the North East. Join the debate at www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/NorthEast/Aboutus/chris-roberts-blog

Chris Roberts

Corporate

Partnerships in the North East pass the Diploma test

Nine pioneering partnerships to offer first places on brand new Diploma qualification.

Young people aged 14-19 in the North East will be amongst the first in the country to be able to study a new and work-relevant qualification at school and college in 2008, with the introduction of a new Diploma, which was recently announced by Education and Skills Secretary Alan Johnson and Schools Minister Jim Knight. Nine pioneering partnerships, comprising of schools, colleges, employers and other organisations, have been given the go ahead to teach the new Diploma from September 2008 in the North East.

Successful partnerships in the North East include:

- Gateshead 14-19 Consortium
- Hartlepool 14-19 Partnership
- Middlesbrough 14-19 Consortium
- Newcastle City Consortium
- North Tyneside Learning Partnership
- Sunderland 14-19 Partnership
- Co. Durham 14-19 Consortium

Young people across the ability range in the North East will be able to study a Diploma from September 2008 choosing from one or more of the following lines of learning: Construction; Creative and Media; Engineering; Information Technology; or Society Health and Development.

The new Diploma will allow students to progress to further study, university or work. 2,149 students in the North East will be able to choose Diplomas alongside GCSEs or A Levels or in place of them.

Young people will have a wider choice to study what they want and where they want and will be better prepared for further study or work. Diplomas uniquely combine essential skills and knowledge, hands-on experience and working with employers.

The intention is that by 2013 young people will be able to choose a Diploma in one of 14 'lines of learning'. The first five are available from September 2008. Students will be able to learn in different environments, including schools, colleges and workplaces.

For more information visit www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19.

Regional Commissioning Plan

LSC North East's commissioning strategy is now available.

The LSC North East Regional Commissioning Plan was published in January. It is a one year plan which sets out our priorities for the coming year and our commissioning strategy, developed in the context of a longer term vision for the North East, which we share with our partners in the region. It is that:

The North East will be a region where present and future generations have a high quality of life. It will be a vibrant, self reliant, ambitious and outward looking region featuring a dynamic economy, a healthy environment and

a distinctive culture. Everyone will have the opportunity to realise their potential.

In March, the four local Annual Plans 2007-08 were published. These plans set out our key challenges and the activities we will undertake to meet those challenges during 2007-08. The plans can be accessed at www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/Northeast/Aboutus/AnnualPlans.

Framework for Excellence

- Where we are today

Outcomes of the Framework for Excellence consultation and policy paper now available.

Over the next five years, we will be moving to a very different further education sector. Colleges and providers will be more focussed than ever on meeting the demands of customers: learners, employers and communities.

The Framework for Excellence is being developed to help bring about this radically different FE sector.

Its purpose is to:

- set out levels of performance and progression required to deliver the highest quality provision to learners and employers;
- provide clear, unambiguous information to learners and employers about providers;
- be a management tool to help providers improve quality;
- enable moves towards self-regulation; and
- provide a transparent mechanism for Ofsted, the LSC and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) to support (or to challenge) providers.

The Framework for Excellence policy paper was published in late March. If you would like to see a copy, visit the publications section of the Framework for Excellence website www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe.

Increased collaboration: listening and responding to the views of the sector

In July 2006, the LSC published a consultation paper inviting the sector to comment on the Framework.

The overall response to the Framework was one of cautious acceptance.

There were, however, a number of caveats expressed:

- there was a strong preference for the use of the four-point scale from the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) throughout the Framework, and support for a single Framework that integrates the Framework for Excellence with the CIF

- it was felt that a star rating on its own is too simplistic and should at least be combined with an accompanying statement
- there was widespread support for self-assessment being the basis of the Framework; and a strong feeling that qualitative as well as quantitative judgements should inform the overall performance assessments
- respondents felt that the timescale for implementation was unrealistic with a view that this should be delayed until 2008
- there were strong views that school sixth forms should be included in the Framework
- there were widespread views that, given the growth and expansion of mixed economy institutions, not only the LSC, DfES, Ofsted and QIA needed to endorse and use the Framework, so too should the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA)
- there were serious concerns that the Framework would increase rather than reduce bureaucracy.

So - what has been done about these concerns?

Ministers have agreed to a revised schedule of testing and development: from September 2008 for FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and work-based learning providers, and from September 2009 for all other providers. Ministers have also agreed to the use of the four-point scale from the CIF, throughout the Framework.

The LSC has extended the number of interested parties to ensure that it is able to serve an increased number of needs.

The principles of the Framework have been revised and extended to include development and implementation. The phrase 'key performance indicator' has now been replaced with the phrase 'key performance area'.

Corporate

One million milestone exceeded as Government steps closer to reaching Leitch's ambition

1,141,000 UK adults now qualified to Level 2.

Figures published in March reveal that the Government is one step closer to meeting Lord Leitch's bold ambitions for the UK to become a world leader on skills. Almost three quarters of the workforce now have a Level 2 qualification (the equivalent of five good GCSEs) and the minimum skill level required to get a job and improve their productivity.

In addition, over half the population has a Level 3 qualification, the equivalent of two A Levels. Lord Sandy Leitch challenged the Government in December 2006 to get at least 90% of the population equipped with Level 2 qualifications by 2020.

Compared to four years ago, 1,141,000 more adults in the UK are now qualified to Level 2, exceeding the one million milestone set for adult skills targets for the end of 2006.

The final Labour Force Survey of 2006 shows that 73.9% of adults in the workforce now have a Level 2 or equivalent qualification; this corresponds to around 17.5 million adults from a total economically active population of 23.7 million. In addition, 52.4% are now qualified to NVQ Level 3, corresponding to around 12.4 million adults out of the total.

Half a million young people earn while they learn

More than 500,000 young people claim Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

Over half a million 16-18 year olds in England have benefited from EMA since September, according to new figures released in March.

In the past six months over 500,000 individual young people have claimed the payment, which offers young people up to £30 a week to stay on post-16 providing they commit to learning and attend a work-based learning provider, college or school.

EMA has enabled more young people to stay on in learning after their GCSEs, with the last academic year (05/06) seeing the highest number of 16 year olds in learning since 1994 – with 89.1 per cent in some form of learning.

EMA is available for a range of vocational and academic courses, including GCSE retakes, A Levels, NVQs, Entry to Employment (e2e) and Programme led Apprenticeships, so the LSC is urging young people to find out if they're eligible.

16-18 year olds across England may be eligible to receive EMA if they remain in learning and are from a household income in tax year 2007/08 of up to £30,810.

Find out more about EMA by logging onto www.direct.gov.uk/ema, or call 0808 10 16219.

More young people achieve key qualification level

Level 2 attainment at 19 rises by 5.1 percentage points in the UK.

A large increase in the number and proportion of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications – five GCSEs grades A*-C or the vocational equivalent – was announced recently.

In 2004, 66.3 per cent of 19 year olds had reached Level 2, but official statistics show that 71.4 per cent achieved this level last year –surpassing the target of 69.3 per cent.

Level 2 provides a crucial platform of skills for employability. The increase means that the equivalent of over 40,000 more 19 year olds have achieved better prospects for good careers, compared to those who turned 19 in 2004.

The results mean that the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the LSC have met their national targets to increase the number of 19 year olds achieving Level 2 by 2006. An increasing proportion of 19 year olds have also qualified to Level 3 – equivalent to two A Levels.

By achieving the key Level 2 qualifications, young people can look forward to:

- a higher starting salary – of £1,700 more a year, compared to those without five good GCSEs or the vocational equivalent;
- an 88 per cent higher chance of skilled employment; and
- a far higher likelihood to be working for an employer who will invest time and money in their development.

The new data also reveals that the number of 19 year olds achieving Level 3 qualifications – such as A Levels or their vocational equivalents – has risen by 4.7 percentage points since 2004 to 46.8 per cent in 2006, also in line with Government targets.

CoLaS

CELEBRATION OF LEARNING AND SKILLS AWARDS 2007

Hollywood came to the North East (almost) – as the LSC North East launched the CoLaS Awards.

Residents could be forgiven for thinking that Hollywood had come to the North East recently, as two of the world's most famous actors, 'Brad Pitt' and 'Angelina Jolie', visited the region to launch the LSC North East's CoLaS Awards 2007.

The CoLaS Awards, which were first held in the North East in 2006, have been designed by the LSC North East to honour the achievements of some of the region's most outstanding individuals and employers, recognising their innovative and progressive approach to skills development and overall learning excellence.

The LSC North East is urging people to nominate employers or individuals with that little bit of star quality.

'Brad' and 'Angelina', or rather their look-a-likes, Jeremy Dyck and Lissa Statham, were guests of honour at the March pre-awards launch, taking time out of their busy celebrity lifestyles to enjoy a whistle-stop tour of North East landmarks, including Sunderland's Wearmouth Bridge, Darlington's High Row, the HMS Trincomalee in Hartlepool, Stockton Riverside College and The Sage in Gateshead where the 'Oscars' style ceremony for the 2007 CoLaS Awards will be held.

Continued on page 8...



(L-R) 'Brad' (Jeremy Dyck), 'Angelina' (Lissa Statham) and Chris Roberts (LSC) launch the Celebration of Learning and Skills Awards at The Sage, Gateshead, where the 'Oscars' style ceremony will be held in October.



'Brad Pitt' and 'Angelina Jolie' look-a-likes, Jeremy Dyck and Lissa Statham with Tom Crompton, LSC director launch the Celebration of Learning and Skills Awards in Hartlepool.



Celebrity look-a-likes Jeremy Dyck and Lissa Statham in Sunderland to launch the Celebration of Learning and Skills Awards.

Continued from page 7...

Open to any individual over the age of 14 and any size or type of employer in the North East, this year's CoLaS Awards ceremony is set to be the biggest event of its kind ever to be held in the region, with organisers going all out to ensure that every one of the expected 1,000 guests is made to feel like a true Hollywood star.

The October 12 ceremony will be packed with entertainment from famous names, with up-and-coming regional acts also being given the chance to experience the glitz and glamour, by auditioning for a chance to play live on the night.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "The skills debate is high on the agenda at the moment, but the CoLaS Awards 2007 will showcase achievement and progress on an unprecedented scale, that will really put the North East on the map. The real 'Brad' and 'Angelina' are both mega stars and it was great to be able to bring a touch of Hollywood glamour to the region for the launch, but the real stars at the CoLaS awards will definitely be the nominees."

For a full list of awards categories and information on how to nominate an employer or individual, visit www.lsc.gov.uk/colas07



'Brad' and 'Angelina', alias Jeremy Dyck and Lissa Statham with LSC director, Tom Crompton at the launch of the Celebration of Learning and Skills Awards in Darlington.



'Brad' and 'Angelina' look-a-likes, Jeremy Dyck and Lissa Statham pictured with Tom Crompton, LSC director, in Stockton to launch the Celebration of Learning and Skills Awards in Stockton.



The search is on for the crème-de-la-crème of the North East

The search is on for up-and-coming stars in the North East to perform at the CoLaS Awards 2007.

The LSC is running the region's biggest ever talent contest - 'The Audition'. The best five acts will get the chance to perform live on stage alongside professional acts, at the glitzy awards ceremony.

Budding comperes are also being given the chance to work alongside the professional master of ceremonies for the awards, Kirsty Gallacher, as a guest presenter.

The ceremony, which is being held at The Sage Gateshead on 12th October, will include entertainment from famous names and is set to be the biggest event of its kind ever held in the region, with organisers going all out to ensure that every one of the expected 1,000 guests is made to feel like a true Hollywood star.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "We are looking for the five most talented performing arts acts in the North East ranging from talented singers and musicians to dancers and comedians. There is also the chance of hosting the event alongside Kirsty Gallacher, which is another fantastic opportunity."

"The winners will be given the chance of a lifetime to perform live on stage in front of 1,000 guests, alongside professional acts at the biggest and glitziest awards ceremony the North East has ever seen."



(L-R) Karl Guest, Abbi Guest and Claire Smith practising for the audition.

The talent contest is open to anyone (groups or individuals) over the age of 14 from the North East. To enter 'The Audition' competitors need to record a 60-second audition video clip of the act they would like to perform at the CoLaS Awards. This should be sent to Galaxy Radio, which is supporting the contest, or uploaded onto www.lsc.gov.uk/colas07.

The finalists will be asked to attend a live audition on the 18th July, when the winners will be chosen.

Video clips should be sent to 'The Audition,' Galaxy Radio, Kingfisher Way, Silverlink Business Park, Wallsend, Tyne & Wear, NE28 9NX or uploaded onto www.lsc.gov.uk/colas07 under the Audition



Jamie Oliver's cook on North East tour for LSC

Nora Sands rewards hard working school staff for achieving qualifications through the Train to Gain service.

The school cook, who worked with celebrity chef Jamie Oliver to improve the quality of school dinners, visited the North East recently to check on work being done in the region's schools to train school support staff.

Nora Sands, cook at Kidbrooke School in Greenwich, visited schools at South Tyneside, Darlington and Stockton on Tees to meet kitchen staff and make presentations to support staff, including classroom assistants, dinner ladies and a caretaker, who have completed vocational courses to improve their knowledge and skills, through the LSC's Train to Gain service.

Nora became a familiar figure as a result of the hit Channel 4 series, Jamie's School Dinners, which has been credited with inspiring a shake-up in school kitchens, led by the Prime Minister among others, to transform menus too dependent on junk food that was popular with children but lacked nutritional value. The importance of training was highlighted in the programme.

Nora visited Caedmon Community Primary School in Gateshead, Westoe Crown School in South Shields, Whinfield Primary School in Darlington and Ingleby Mill Primary School in Stockton.

At Caedmon Community Primary School in Gateshead, the classroom assistants were described as "the engine room of the school" by the acting head teacher.



Nora Sands celebrates Train to Gain with (L-R) Christine Forbes, June Railton, Phil Wray, Louise Higgins and Barbara Legg, watched by Michael Mitchell, skills development director, LSC North East.

Clive Wisby said he could not heap praise enough on the classroom assistants following their success in gaining NVQ Level 2 qualifications, giving them the skills needed to provide first class teaching assistant services.

Classroom assistants Linda Roll, Margaret Clennell and Paula Drape were congratulated on their achievement by Nora Sands and presented with commemorative Train to Gain aprons.

The 250-pupil Caedmon Community School and nursery is dedicated to the ongoing development of its 30 members of staff and recently gained the coveted Investors in People award. Acting head teacher Clive Wisby said: "We have to ensure that we offer excellent value for money and that our staffing provision is maximising the benefit to the children, so we are enthusiastic about staff development and training."

"The three classroom assistants who have gained their Level 2 qualifications are now continuing their training to achieve Level 3. It has empowered them to take on vital work and I can't imagine how we would manage without them. They are involved in intervention strategies, offering one-to-one support to children who may be in danger of falling behind, and our recovery programme, providing additional maths and reading for children who would benefit from it."

Nora also visited Whinfield Primary School, Darlington, where one of the support staff she met was Phil Wray. When Phil was considered for promotion by the Headteacher and Governors he volunteered to complete a training course, which was funded through the LSC's Train to Gain service. This gave him a VQ in Support Work in Schools which aided his promotion to Buildings Supervisor.

Phil, 36, was one of five support staff at the progressive Whinfield Primary School to undergo training. Four lunchtime supervisors, June Railton, Louise Higgins, Barbara Legg and Christine Forbes, also gained VQs in School Support Work, gaining knowledge and skills to help them advise pupils on nutrition and healthy eating, deal with behaviour, including preventing bullying, and having more awareness of health and safety.

Nora Sands presented staff with Train to Gain aprons to commemorate their commitment to gaining new skills and qualifications. She discussed school menus and the effort being made by the school staff to improve the nutrition and eating habits of the pupils.

Head teacher, Sheila Williams said: "The training has had such a positive impact on the schools. The staff worked with each other to complete their work. It has given them a better understanding of their roles and made them feel more valued. It also confirmed to them that they have a role that is important to the school and the children and that they were doing work that is very worthwhile."

"Most of the support staff came to the school as parents and progressed to voluntary helpers before taking employment with us. One of our dinner ladies is now hoping to continue her studies to become a qualified teaching assistant. It is very rewarding – we like to grow our own here."

Phil Wray said: "My training and qualification has given me the skills to support the staff of the school at supervisor level. It helped to highlight what goes on in school and improved my understanding of many aspects of my work, including health and safety. I use the skills every day and am much more involved in planning and discussing new developments. It has also helped me to deal with contractors and general management of the school site, which is my responsibility day and night throughout the year."

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "Train to Gain is helping many people to realise ambitions that were previously denied to them. The vocational training taking place in schools among supervisors, classroom assistants and caretakers such as Phil Wray is raising standards of service and developing the skills of the workforce, to the benefit of pupils, teachers and education across the region."



Nora Sands (left) meets classroom assistants (L-R) Lynda Roll, Margaret Clennell and Paula Drape at Caedman Community Primary School, Gateshead, watched by Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East.



(L-R): Nora Sands pictured with Megan Boddy, aged seven, and cook in charge Jackie McDonald at Westoe Crown Primary School.

Skills Brokerage in the North East

Train to Gain aims to help organisations get the training they need to stay ahead in a competitive environment by improving the skills of the workforce and has been developed as part of a wider effort by the Regional Skills Partnership in the North East to increase the productivity and further regenerate the region.

A skills brokerage service jointly funded by LSC North East and the Regional Development Agency, One NorthEast, offers impartial advice and matches training needs to local providers of learning, to ensure that flexible, responsive training programmes are delivered to meet employers' needs. A core element of Train to Gain is the access to appropriate funding of Skills for Life, first Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Level 3 NVQs and Management and Leadership learning opportunities.

For more information about Train to Gain, call 0800 0833312 or visit www.traintogain.gov.uk



Caring company looks after its own



(L-R): Carers Joan Carr, Rebecca Sutton, Gill Glendinning of Tynedale Care give Neil Robinson a helping hand.

Tynedale Care shows that training can have an impact on the bottom line.

Caring for its staff has helped a company set up to look after others make rapid progress in recent months.

A commitment to the training and development of its people has played a key part in business growth and the creation of new jobs for Tynedale Care, which provides anything from a monthly shopping trip to round the clock care for 170 people in the Tyne Valley.

One of those people, Multiple Sclerosis sufferer, Neil Robinson from Hexham, said: "I have had help from Tynedale Care for a number of years and have always found the services offer the flexibility and level of support I need at a consistently high standard."

According to registered manager Gill Glendinning: "The training we have done has undoubtedly improved the quality of the care we provide which has, in turn, led to new contracts."

And the statistics back up the claims. Hexham based Tynedale Care has 20% more business than it did six months ago and it now employs the equivalent of 43 full time staff. "Recruiting and keeping good people has always been a challenge in this business," added Gill: "So we decided to make this a priority and looked to see what kind of help we could get."

Northern Care Training put together and delivered the programme of NVQ training and assessment for Tynedale Care which has created a greater understanding within the business, improved motivation and driven up performance.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "While the benefits of training are often easy to see in manufacturing due to improved productivity, they are not always so obvious in the service sector. However Tynedale Care's experience shows that the results can be equally dramatic and the company is an example to other service businesses that training really does positively impact on the bottom line."



(L-R): Stefan Atkinson, Brian Ellis and Michael Rivers take a break with a brew.

Training brews at Tetley's

Tetley's find that training can build their team spirit.

They may have been making tea since 1837 but the Tetley Tea Folk are some of the latest recruits to the Train to Gain service.

Fourteen people in the company's distribution warehouse in Newton Aycliffe are studying for NVQs as part of Train to Gain.

The company approached Acklam Hall Training Services, the Employer Service Department within Middlesbrough College, to devise and deliver the training programme.

The move was designed to benchmark the company's logistics, warehousing and distribution performance but as Training Manager, Larry Guy explains, it has achieved much more than that.

"We never expected the programme to be met with such enthusiasm," he said: "To be honest, we thought there may even be some scepticism but everyone has really committed themselves to it and the results have proved a real eye opener."

"Team working and problem solving have improved tremendously and people are now coming forward with ideas and suggestions on how we can implement a programme of continuous improvement in the warehouse. It has also identified some minor skills gaps in the team which everyone has rallied round to plug."

"All this has created a much closer knit and motivated workforce which has a far better understanding of the business and the role it plays within it, which is a real bonus."

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "This just goes to show that even the most established and successful companies can benefit from training. In fact these companies are usually the ones which carry out most training because they understand the business benefits it produces."

"I am delighted the workforce at Tetley has been so enthused by the process and I guess we now know what it is they talk about during their tea breaks!"



An immaculate training record

Gateshead Council compete with the best thanks to Train to Gain.

Business is booming for Gateshead Council's Transport, Cleaning and Catering division.

Prestigious contracts, an increase in annual turnover, happy customers and reductions in staff turnover are all attributed to one key ingredient – the effective development of its hard-working staff.

With 650 employees, spread across 250 buildings that cover a 2,000 square mile area, including Berwick, Hexham and Houghton-le-Spring, many other large employers might have baulked at the thought of developing a training programme.

Although the busy division has always taken staff training very seriously, it was happy to accept some additional support, via the Train to Gain service.

Building Cleaning Manager, Bryan Redhead, first found out about Train to Gain through Tyne and Wear based, B-Skill Ltd.

As a result, over 200 employees have gained NVQs at Level 2 in Cleaning and a further 20 have achieved qualifications in numeracy, literacy and application of numbers, designed to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills, with training assistance from B-Skill Ltd.

"With the help of B-Skill Ltd and Train to Gain we were able to look at our staff training programme more objectively," said Bryan. "In particular, we've found that many components of the NVQ complement the cleaning service standards that we have to adhere to, with an emphasis on additional elements, such as customer care."



(L-R): Bryan Redhead, Lee Craggs and Roy Young at The Baltic, where they have recently been awarded a cleaning contract.

With more and more contracted work now being put out to tender and stiff competition from private cleaning companies, the division has certainly had to prove its worth. But if proof was needed, the results and consequent business benefits, speak for themselves.

"Our staff turnover has reduced from 24% to 14%," explains Bryan. "We have been awarded contracts via open tender for The Sage in Gateshead, the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and a number of schools throughout Gateshead. We also look after the cleaning services of all of Gateshead Council's public buildings, such as libraries and Sure Start buildings, as well as the majority of schools. We provide a home cleaning service for elderly residents in warden controlled homes and we also have the cleaning contract with Northumbria Police Authority. What's more, despite being in such a competitive industry, our annual turnover has increased year on year."

Bryan is also quick to point out that, as well as the tailor-made training programme, dedicated and flexible employees have also helped to make a huge difference.

"The results are indicative of the fantastic job that's being done by our colleagues. Not only in their day-to-day work, but in the way that they've embraced the training that's on offer to learn new skills and increase their self-confidence. Train to Gain has proved an excellent business tool for attracting, training and retaining the right people."

One person who has experienced the benefits of Train to Gain first hand, is 36 year old Lee Craggs from Leam Lane, Gateshead. He said: "The NVQ has given me the confidence and ability to carry out my cleaning tasks to a safe and excellent standard."

A responsive approach to training

Train to Gain helps limited funds go further for charitable organisation.



As a charitable organisation supporting people with learning disabilities or mental health needs - United Response - has many demands on its finances.

With a team of over 2,000 employees throughout England and Wales, the cost of making sure staff have the relevant skills and qualifications is a constant challenge.

Their work includes helping adults for a few hours a week in their own home, providing 24-hour care in registered care homes, or giving additional support at college or in the workplace. To achieve all of this the expertise and knowledge of the workforce is paramount.

With the support of the Train to Gain service, two employees based at the organisation's Whickham centre in Newcastle, have just achieved NVQs at Level 2 in Health and Social Care. There are also plans for a further six to be put forward for NVQs, which will take the percentage of the centre's workforce, who hold this important competence based qualification, to almost 50%.

Through Train to Gain, United Response was put in touch with specialist training company, Phoenix Training Services Ltd, which helped them analyse the current skills within their business. They also made some recommendations for development and helped put the training into practice.

"Health and Safety was a major factor within the NVQ training, it showed me the importance of checking cables, warning signs and the risks of cross contamination if colour coded equipment is not used. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and encourage my team at The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art to pursue the training opportunities available to them."

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added: "Many larger organisations, particularly those working across multiple sites, might perceive that it's too hard to arrange individual training programmes for their staff. Train to Gain eliminates such worries by providing a flexible, tailor-made training service that can be delivered at a time and place to suit individuals and the companies they work for. What's more, it's also a means of identifying available funding to pay for, or subsidise, training costs."

Service manager, Claudia Beutelspacher, explains: "The training has been very useful for one of our employees in particular, who has been with us for less than a year and came from a totally different industry. Working towards an NVQ provides practical skills as well as an opportunity to put them into practice immediately in the work environment. Train to Gain has made it easy for us to find solutions to our training needs, whilst at the same time supporting us with the costs."

Maxine Dawson, aged 28, from Birtley in Gateshead, is one of the employees who has benefited with the help of Train to Gain. She said: "In my job as a senior support worker, I work as part of a team to look after three men with learning and physical disabilities. Although I have had a number of jobs in various caring professions, the NVQ has given me formal recognition for my work and experience."

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added: "People working in the care profession have come under more and more public scrutiny in recent years. Whether workers are new to the industry, or have a number of years experience behind them, they are all having to update and develop their skills and knowledge to keep on top of new practices and changing legislation. Train to Gain gives them the tools to do exactly that."



Service manager Claudia Beutelspacher (left) and senior support worker Maxine Dawson provide a vital service supporting people with learning disabilities or mental health needs.

Individual

Anything you can do....

North East women prove they can 'cut it' as well as the men.

Thirty women from the North East are proving that you don't have to be a burly bloke to be a dab hand at skills that have been traditionally seen as 'men's work'.

Bricklaying, joinery, motor mechanics, electrical engineering, horticulture and painting and decorating are all being tackled with enthusiasm, as part of a 'non-traditional skills for women' course, run by City of Sunderland College's Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) at the Hylton Centre, in conjunction with women's charity, 'Bridge'.

The twenty week course, funded by a European Social Fund (ESF) grant, awarded by the LSC North East, aims to build the self-confidence of women who are unwaged, unemployed, or in low paid, part-time work.

All get to try their hand at a variety of practical skills, with a view to taking their learning further. And whilst the women are heaving their hods, wielding their wire cutters and tightening their tappets, they can also work towards an Open College Network qualification in Construction, or, in nearly all cases, a City and Guilds qualification in a relevant discipline.

Organised around a one day a week timetable, with childcare and transport provided, there are two main parts to the course. During the first term, half a day a week is spent at the Bridge learning centre in Washington. It is here that the women look at developing their assertiveness and decision making skills, as well as gaining an understanding of diversity in society.

The remaining half is spent in the workshops at City of Sunderland College, where practical taster sessions are laid on to provide an insight into different skills.

During the second term the women specialise in one chosen skill area to study in more depth. At the same time, those that need to are encouraged to brush up their literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to pass national tests at Levels 1 and 2.

Chief executive of Bridge, Sheila Davidson, who campaigns tirelessly to support this type of initiative, is delighted at the response.

"Funding for charities and voluntary based projects has become much harder to secure over recent years. You only have to look at the numbers who have signed up for this particular course – over twice our original estimate – to see that there is a demand for this type of training. We even have a full list of names on a waiting list for the next programme."

"We are therefore delighted to have the financial means of running courses like this, that allow more women to change direction, pursue a career or even apply their new skills within their own homes," said Sheila.

One person who is thriving in the practical sessions is 32 year old Billi Jean Summerbell from Durham, who is a fully qualified youth worker. As someone who regularly works with young people, Billi Jean is hoping that her involvement with the course will help to change people's perceptions of how women are viewed in the workplace.

"I think it's really important that young people are exposed to a wide range of positive role models. There are still a lot of people who pigeon hole women into the stereotypical jobs that they think they should do. I see this course, not only as a means of educating myself, but as a way of giving me practical skills that I can pass onto others around me," explains Billi Jean.



(L-R): Billi Jean Summerbell, Teresa Turnbull and Helen Liddell roll up their sleeves for some brickwork practice.

For single mum Helen Liddell, aged 25, from Washington, the course is giving her a broader range of choices for her next career move.

"I've been busy at home looking after my two children for a while, but I really feel that it's now time to spread my wings. I've already been involved in a few confidence building courses at Bridge and I've just completed a Counselling Skills qualification at Level 3. I'm hoping that this latest course will give me an insight into other areas of work, so that I can choose a long-term career that's right for me. Thanks to the motor mechanics element, there's also an added bonus that I won't have to run to my Dad anymore when I have car trouble," said Helen.

Teresa Turnbull, aged 36 from Birtley, already has a string of qualifications to her name, ranging from beauty therapy, through to sign language and genetics.



Her latest venture, however, is the one that she hopes will provide a stepping stone to a job.

"Sometimes the only thing holding women back is their self-confidence. As a stay at home mum, I've been out of the workplace for a number of years. It's great to have courses such as this that develop your self-esteem and give you practical skills at the same time. Now that my son is sixteen, I'm looking at ways of getting back into work. In particular, I believe that more and more women are capable of doing jobs that have traditionally been carried out by men," explains Teresa.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added: "This demand-led course is a great example of partnership working. It provides a perfect blend of confidence building techniques and practical skills that lead to a recognised qualification and a route into further learning or a job. I wish each of the women involved every success in achieving their goals."



Here comes the entrepreneur

North East entrepreneur Donna Marie shows how training helps to build successful businesses.

Donna Marie Caldwell shrugged off the shock of redundancy to start her own business and claim honours in the North East women entrepreneur awards.

But despite this success – based on rapid growth of her L'amour operations – she has signed herself and her staff up for a series of business training courses.

The training is being delivered by ITEC North East, funded through the LSC North East.

"There's always something more you can learn," says Donna Marie, from Washington, who runs L'amour Bridal, Wedding Co-ordination, Event Management, L'amour Men and Curves by L'amour from Boldon Lane in South Shields.

"At first it was just me, working from home, cluttering up the place with swatches of material and half made bridal gowns everywhere but we now have our own premises and have already twice expanded into adjoining buildings.

"We have done well and moved into a number of new areas over the first couple of years but I know that the team needs the right skills to consolidate this growth and that's why three of us are doing formal training."

Donna Marie and Kath Young, who runs the bridal shop, are working towards NVQ Level 2 in IT while event manager Nicola Frain is taking an extra step and studying for an Apprenticeship in the same subject.

For Kath, 52 and from Jarrow, it's the last thing she expected to be doing, having taken early retirement from retail to look for a part time job: "I'm working harder than ever but I love it," she said: "And although I have not studied or taken an exam since my CSEs, in 1970, I am really enjoying my course which is definitely helping me to do my job more effectively."

Nicola, 25 and from Whitley Bay, became aware of the L'amour businesses when working as an advertising sales representative and quit to join the company. She said: "Some people might question why I would leave a big, established firm to join a new venture but I just knew this business was going places."

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added: "It is encouraging to see that successful businesses like Donna Marie's still see the value of constantly developing skills through training to further improve their businesses performance."

"In the increasingly competitive and fast moving world of work, those who develop their people to motivate and help them embrace change, will create the most successful organisations."



Nicola Frain, Donna Marie and Kath Young are all undertaking training to improve their IT skills.

Individual

All change for bus driver Kevin

Inspiring Kevin Orange proves that there's always hope with the right skills and attitude.



Kevin Orange is back on the road to work thanks to the Newcastle College Trade Union Education Centre, which was recently endowed with the government sponsored Matrix Excellence Award.

A heart attack put a stop to driver Kevin Orange's 25 year career on the buses, leaving his job prospects and earning capacity at a dead end.

But now he's back on the road to work with new skills and renewed confidence thanks to the support and guidance he received from an award winning Trade Union Education Centre.

Kevin, 48 and from Old Benwell in Newcastle, became ill just over a year ago and whilst he has made a fairly good recovery, the dizzy spells and breathlessness he still occasionally suffers meant his Passenger Service Vehicle License was withdrawn.

Unsure what to do, he got in touch with the Newcastle College Trade Union Education Centre in George Street which recently became one of only ten information, advice and guidance (IAG) operations in the UK to receive a government sponsored Matrix Excellence Award.

"Apart from a brief spell running a small green grocery business I'd spent all my working life driving buses," said Kevin: "To be honest I really didn't know what I was going to do when my license was withdrawn – until I contacted the centre. They showed me the options available and I haven't looked back since."

LSC North East funded training has given Kevin new focus, direction and ambition: "First I enrolled on numeracy and literacy courses to improve my all round skills," he said: "That gave me the confidence to move on to IT training and I am now studying for qualifications in web design. This is something I am thoroughly enjoying and I hope it will lead either to work in this

area or even the opportunity to become self employed."

Carol Wood is project co-ordinator at the education centre. She said: "We have a team of three whose jobs include, among many other things, offering advice and guidance to students at the college, people like Kevin and sometimes, unfortunately, people facing redundancy.

"Our aim is always to help people maximise their skills in the areas required in the workplace today so that they can realise their full potential. Clearly we must be doing something right to have received Matrix recognition. We are delighted about the award but what's more important is that we've set so many people on a path to improving their qualifications and their lives."

Backed by the DfES, the Matrix Standard, now in its fifth year, is the national quality standard for any organisation that provides information, advice and / or guidance on learning and work. Awards are held annually in London.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "In the past people like Kevin who, for whatever reason, were unable to continue in a job they had done for years, might have been left to live a life outside work and on benefits."

"With the right advice and guidance his versatility and creativity has been demonstrated and developed and he is looking forward to a productive working life in a completely new area. I wish him every success."

TV presenter encourages North East students

Former Blue Peter presenter Matt Baker shares his tips for success with North East teenagers.

Television presenter Matt Baker was in the North East recently to encourage teenagers to gain good qualifications.

Matt, who hails from the North East and who presented BBC TV's Blue Peter for seven years, visited The King's Academy, Coulby Newham; Bishop Auckland College; Walbottle Campus Technology College and All Saints College, West Denton to support the LSC North East in encouraging young people to gain five GCSEs at good grades or an equivalent Apprenticeship, known as a Level 2 qualification.

He also highlighted the support available to young people through EMA.

Matt's visit coincided with the start of a month-long campaign in the region's schools to encourage young people to stay in learning and achieve their qualifications. The campaign involves teams visiting students who are preparing for their GCSE exams, to talk about the benefits of a good education and handing out information.

Matt explained how, after gaining good qualifications at school, he went on to study acting at Queen Margaret's College in Edinburgh before joining Blue Peter. Matt was on hand to answer questions from students and to impress upon them that his big break came only after putting in the foundations of his education during his GCSE studies at school.

He said: "I was only really interested in sport at school, becoming a British gymnastic and sports acrobatics champion. But I realised just in time that I needed to gain good GCSE qualifications to go on to college and dropped my sports activities to concentrate on my academic studies. I gained the qualifications I needed and they gave me the opportunity to study acting and get my big break on Blue Peter."



Television presenter Matt Baker (kneeling centre) pictured with Chris Roberts (rear), regional director, LSC North East, and students of Walbottle Campus Technology College.



In the frame – students of Bishop Auckland College capture a lasting reminder on their mobile phone cameras of the visit by TV presenter Matt Baker.

By achieving Level 2 qualifications, which is five GCSEs grade A* to C or equivalent, young people could earn on average £4,000 more every year than someone without a Level 2 qualification. Employers are increasingly demanding a Level 2 equivalent qualification when recruiting young people.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, said: "Matt is one of our most popular television presenters and many of the young people currently preparing for their GCSE exams will have grown up with him during his time on Blue Peter. I believe that the majority of young people in the North East appreciate the benefits of gaining five A* to C grades, or the equivalent such as an Apprenticeship, but hearing how important it is from somebody they might have looked up to during their childhood and who clearly represents a good role model hopefully encouraged them to give their studies that final, essential effort."

Janice Bray, chief executive, Connexions County Durham, who along with the other three Connexions partnerships in the region, are working alongside the LSC on this campaign, added: "We are working in partnership with LSC North East to spread the word to young people that achieving qualifications either at school, college or through an Apprenticeship gives them a better chance to get on in life and fulfill their potential."

Janice said "This was an important time for young people as they approached exam time, and we want to ensure that they get all the additional support they need to explore their future learning options. We would urge any young person who needs support and guidance to contact their local Connexions centre."

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