



>LSC

Leading learning and skills

the magazine

**Train to
Gain launch**

**Lord Leitch
review for
developing
skills**

January 2007

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

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Cover picture:

Acklington Prison is the first in the country to pilot a new training programme aimed at helping offenders turn their lives around and make a valuable contribution to society.

the magazine

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Foreword

Hello and welcome to the January issue of the Magazine. This issue is packed full of news from the LSC North East and it celebrates the achievements of employers, young people and adults alike, whilst updating you on our plans and activities across the region.

In December the much anticipated Leitch Report on future skills needs of the UK economy was released, defining for Government the skills profile the UK should aim to achieve by 2020 in order to support this country's productivity, economic growth and social objectives. The LSC welcomes the vision for world-class skills and the scale of the challenge set by Lord Leitch. Lord Leitch concludes his report by saying: "Skills were once a key lever for prosperity and fairness. Skills are now increasingly the key lever." We applaud the vision for a system that is simplified, empowered and responsive to learner and employer demands for the skills they need to succeed in business and in life. And we support closer alignment of the employer with the skills agenda.

The Government's Education and Training Bill was proposed in the Queen's Speech in November, which further demonstrated the commitment to the Further Education sector by placing it firmly centre stage in building the skills of the country. Importantly, the Bill detailed key proposals to streamline the structure of the LSC non-executive, removing the requirement for the LSC to establish Local Councils, and includes a requirement to establish nine new Regional Councils. This move will strengthen the LSC's ability to work effectively at a regional level whilst simplifying the local landscape – but does not take away the LSC's commitment to being a locally focused organisation. More information on this is available inside.

Importantly, our Annual Statement of Priorities was published in October. This document clearly details national priorities for the coming year, and reflects on the significant progress and achievements made in the past year, across England. The Statement will shape and focus activity in the North East as we continue to strive to reach challenging targets.

We formally launched Train to Gain – a major new service to help North East employers improve the skills of their workforce – in September, and we invited key partners, the media and celebrities from the world of soap opera to come and join us to launch the service. Results show that

the North East is performing well against targets for Train to Gain and has already attracted more than 2100 enquiries from employers eager to become involved and some 3500 individuals have been involved in Train to Gain since it was initially made available in April this year.

In this issue we celebrate the achievement of employers in the region, from Bells Stores in Redcar achieving Beacon Status to Cleveland Potash in East Cleveland who have six teenagers training to be electricians and mechanical fitters 'going underground' as part of their Apprenticeship.

We also take a close look at the work being done around Offender Learning and in particular focus on the work being done at Acklington Prison in Northumberland, where ex-offenders are being given the opportunity to develop skills and many are training to be cable jointers. The Prison is the first in the country to pilot a new programme aimed at helping offenders turn their lives around.

We have faced some tough questions around the issue of funding changes and effects on courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, a recent regional review of learning found many areas of good practice in the region, including a special educational support



Chris Roberts
Regional Director,
LSC North East.

programme helping a group of learners with learning difficulties gain qualifications and break down barriers to work. I am sure you'll find this article of interest.

I will conclude by sending you all the best wishes for 2007. I look forward to working with you in the New Year.

Ch. Roberts.

Transforming the learning and skills sector in the North East

The LSC has a vision for the future.

Together with our partners we will lead schools, colleges and other training providers on a journey to reform the system to benefit employers, young people and adults.

In order to do this we have as an organisation recently completed a major transformation. We have moved from four local LSC's to 12 partnership and 2 economic development teams, split between Area North and Area South.

The other key directorates of Skills, Finance & Resources, Learning, Planning

and Performance, Marketing and Communications and Regional Office Support have been co-located in our regional centre, which is based in Gateshead.

To aid the understanding of our new structure and introduce the senior team who have thus far been appointed into the leading roles within the LSC North East we have printed and distributed our "Transforming the learning and skills sector in the North East". Should you require a copy please call Nadine Gourley on 0191 492 6434 or email nadine.gourley@lsc.gov.uk.

New Education and Training Bill reinforces the LSC's position in the sector

The Queen's Speech in November marked an important day for the FE sector and for the LSC, as it promised a Bill "to reform the Further Education system so that it can better equip people with the skills that they and the economy need".

The LSC has a vision of a transformed learning and skills system which has at its heart the needs of learners and employers, and which is seen as valued, proud, responsive, confident and trusted. This proposed legislation supports and enables that vision and the Education and Training Bill will no doubt be a comprehensive and challenging Bill which will help the LSC to deliver its ambitious agenda for change programme.

Immediately after the announcement Chris Banks, LSC National Chair said:

"This Bill demonstrates the Government's commitment to the sector by putting it firmly centre stage in building the skills of the nation. It will also enable the LSC to reinforce its role as a strategic partner and 'market maker', recognising success while driving out poor quality to the benefit of employers, individuals, communities and the economy."

Importantly, the Bill detailed key proposals to streamline the structure of the LSC non-executive nationally, creating nine regional Councils which will be employer lead and removing the requirement for the LSC to establish Local Councils. During the last 12 months the LSC has significantly reformed the executive side, with a regional office based in Gateshead and dedicated Partnership teams based across the region, with one in each of the following 12 areas: Darlington, Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Newcastle, Northumberland, Sunderland and County Durham.

The new Regional Council will have a minimum of 10 members and will exist from Autumn 2007, replacing the 4 local LSC Councils in Tees Valley, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Northumberland,

where there are currently around 60 Council members in total.

This move will strengthen the LSC's ability to work effectively at a regional level whilst simplifying the local landscape – but does not take away the LSC's absolute commitment to being a locally focused organisation.

Also included in the Bill are for the LSC to assume the Secretary of State's powers to establish or dissolve FE corporations, strengthening the LSC's role and ability to influence the sector and improve the choice and quality of learning available and having powers to remove any members of the governing body of an FE corporation, or appoint new members, if deemed necessary. In short, the LSC would be able to intervene where learning provision is unsatisfactory or not improving.

The LSC will have greater powers to provide support services like IT to Further Education and other educational bodies and to change its planning cycle from the April to March financial year to the academic year – a hugely sensible and practical reform the LSC has long advocated.

And finally, to help to secure choice and diversity the LSC has assumed a new duty to create greater learning opportunities for learners and employers to exercise choice in type, place and form of learning. The Bill also establishes effective learner and employer consultation by making sure the LSC and colleges take account of the needs and views of employers and learners.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East said:

"The LSC has a vision of a transformed learning and skills system which has at its heart the needs of learners and employers, and which is seen as valued, proud,

responsive, confident and trusted. This proposed legislation supports and enables that vision to become real.

"The replacement of the local LSC Council's will bring the structure of our non-executives in line with the new executive structure, this does not mean any change to the job roles and structures within LSC North East. We will be working closely with our current council members throughout the coming year, as we work together towards the formation of the new regional council.

"I strongly welcome the reforms proposed in the Education and Training Bill as it devolves more power in many areas to the LSC's across the country. This clearly demonstrates how we, the LSC, have to continue to do more to link skills and employment. To do this we have to raise our game so that the Further Education system as a whole can pursue a more ambitious and systematic approach to skills training as a means of getting more people into jobs.

"This is where the LSC can really add value to the FE market place – acting as an advocate for skills, an expert adviser and as a 'market-maker' – ensuring the LSC's prime role is doing the things that help improve the FE market place. This may be, for example, devolving more control to learners and employers and always seeking to drive up the quality of provision. We face more challenging but utterly rewarding times ahead."

Much of what is talked about in the Education and Training Bill is captured in the LSC's agenda for change programme and is very much critical to the LSC's ways of working. More information on the Bill can be found at www.lsc.gov.uk

LSC report sets out funding priorities for learning and skills in England

The LSC in the North East is looking to 'raise its game' with the publication of its Annual Statement of Priorities.

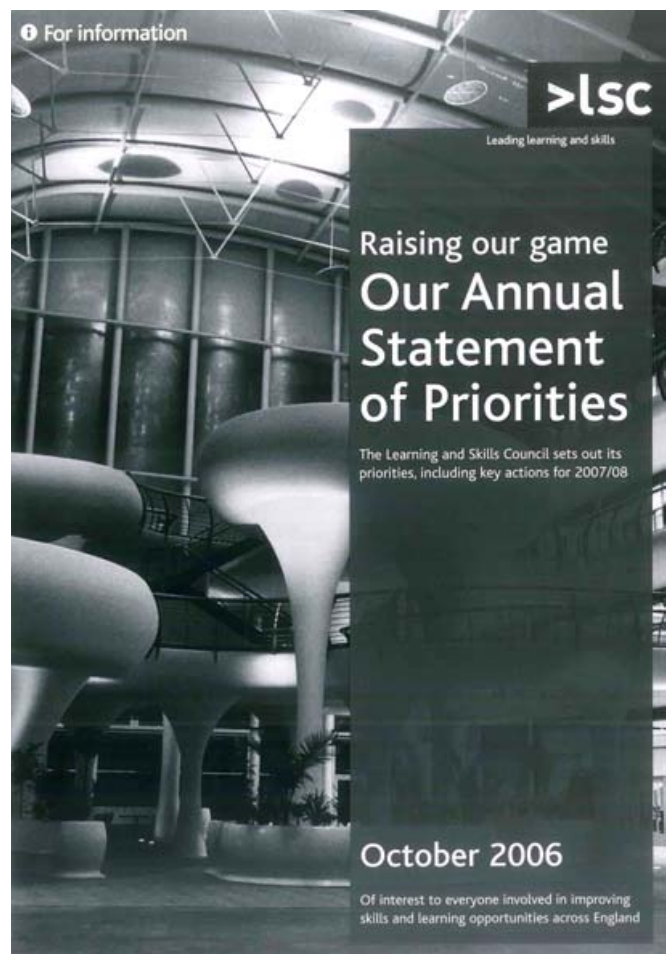
Entitled 'Raising our Game', the publication unveils plans to invest £11.2 billion nationally to help learners and employers during 2007-08. Seven billion pounds will be invested to enable more than 1.3 million young people in school, college or work-based learning to achieve qualifications. Plus, over £3 billion will be spent on adult learning, helping 4.2 million adults to improve their skills.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director, LSC North East said: "The North East is no different to other parts of England whereby it needs a highly skilled workforce if we are to meet not only today's challenges, but also the technological, demographic and global challenges of tomorrow.

"The LSC has already achieved its national Level 2 adult skills target well ahead of schedule. One million adults have achieved essential Level 2 qualifications since 2002 and the LSC is on track to reach its goal of 3.6 million adults reaching Level 2 by 2010. "Put simply, all of these people will have achieved the essential platform for success and progression in learning and work – and this can, quite literally, transform lives.

"But we have much more to do. 'Raising our Game' sets out how we intend to build on the progress and continue towards our goal of creating a skilled workforce to match the best in the world."

The LSC is aiming to have 90 per cent of 17-year-olds in education or training by 2015. The organisation will support 12 new employer-led National Skills Academies, to be opened by 2008, whilst an extra £16.7 million will be invested in the further expansion of Apprenticeships for Adults. The ambitious plans of the LSC are all designed to continue to improve the



reputation of learning and skills in England. The LSC's reform programme, *agenda for change*, pushes a record amount of money directly to the people who want to get on and improve their life chances.

Copies of 'Raising our game – Our Annual Statement of Priorities' are available on the LSC website at: www.lsc.gov.uk

Beacon Status for Sainsbury's at Bells Stores

Anyone unsure about the benefits of work-based learning should check out results at the region's Sainsbury's at Bells stores.



(Clockwise from l to r): Sheila Gibbons, Chief Executive with Bells Training; Christine Jackson, Programme Manager with Bells Training; Graham Hall, Area Manager at Sainsbury's at Bells; Diane Hunt, LSC Partnership Director for Redcar and Cleveland; Dr Ashok Kumar, MP for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland.

Business is booming as the company's certificated training provider, Bells Training Services, develops and drives training programmes which have been awarded Learning and Skills Beacon Status by the LSC in partnership with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

No other food retailer in the UK has achieved the accolade and only one other work-based learning provider in the region has gained such recognition.

At any time, up to 150 of the 1,200 colleagues at the company are working towards certified qualifications through Bells Training, to ensure that everyone at the 59 stores from Tyneside to South Cleveland, has the skills and expertise to deliver the best possible service.

"To be awarded Beacon Status is, without doubt, the highest recognition we could ever receive for the quality of our training delivery," said Sheila Gibbin, Chief Executive of Bells Training Services. "This accolade has been achieved by my team because of their total commitment to ensuring that our learners progress through nationally recognised, government-led training programmes, delivered to the highest possible standards.

"We are looking forward to working closely with other Beacon Status training providers and agencies to share experience and best practice and provide learners with the best opportunities of progression available."

Diane Hunt, the LSC's Partnership Director for Redcar and Cleveland, said: "In a very challenging business environment the organisations with the people best equipped to do the job will be the most competitive and successful. Properly planned and targeted training enables people to develop their true potential."

Bells Training Services clearly understands this and has developed training programmes of the highest quality, which have been integrated into both Sainsbury's at Bells and other parts of the Sainsbury's convenience business.

"This successful delivery has now been nationally recognised. We congratulate them for that and look forward to supporting the further development of the training programmes."

The Leitch Review of Skills

The LSC welcomed Lord Leitch's vision for world-class skills, following the publication of Leitch's independent review to examine the future skills needs of the UK economy. The LSC want more people to operate at a high level in the global economy with increased productivity per head and more people in work. Prosperity for all will be achieved through world class skills - and the Further Education system will be central to this.

LSC National Chair Chris Banks said: "This is a clear rallying call and Lord Leitch has set ambitious challenges to employers, learners and to those who work with them. The LSC is in full agreement that we need to seize this opportunity and ensure that the ambitions of being world-class in skills are met.

"The LSC National Council met to discuss the Leitch Review of Skills and gave its full support to the direction and ambitions contained in the final report.

"We are particularly pleased to see the recognition of the contribution that some of our flagship programmes and services are already making such as Train to Gain, Apprenticeships, Skills for Life, the National Employer Service and the clear direction to build on these to accelerate progress in the years ahead."

Chris Roberts, regional director of the LSC North East added:

"It is a big challenge to be world-class. We have already made considerable progress but there is much, much more which needs to be done. The LSC lies at the heart of this and is ready to play its full part.

"It is clear that we must all continue to accelerate change so that we go further, faster. The LSC North East - and the other eight regional offices across England - recognise and share this ambition and we will continue to raise our game to make this a reality. We look forward to working with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and our partners to achieve

this. In particular the LSC is delighted that the Chancellor has further reinforced his commitment to our Train to Gain service. Over 4,000 individuals from 800 employers in the region have benefited from learning through the service since it was launched in April 2006.

"The Chancellor also announced a threefold increase in the numbers of adults who will be able to gain qualifications by 2011. By doubling Apprenticeships by 2020 to 500,000 nationally he is ensuring we continue to raise the skills of young people alike. Here in the North East we have 2,355 young people in work-based learning, an increase of 2.4% on last year. The Chancellor also committed additional capital for Further Education colleges."

The LSC itself has changed significantly over the past year with the introduction of local Partnership Teams - part of a major reorganisation which has allowed an extra £40m to be spent on learners. There are 12 Partnership Teams based across the North East, with one in each of the following areas: Darlington, Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Newcastle, Northumberland, Sunderland and County Durham.

The full report - The Leitch Review of Skills 'Prosperity for all in the global economy: world class skills' - and the Treasury press release can be found at <http://www.hmtreasury.gov.uk>

Apprenticeships at Cleveland Potash in Redcar & Cleveland

A group of young people from East Cleveland got their first taste of a life underground when they began working life in the country's only potash mine.

The six teenagers, training to be electricians and mechanical fitters for Cleveland Potash Limited, near Saltburn-by-the-Sea, went underground as part of their Apprenticeship training programme. After spending the past two years with training provider TTE, they have just begun two years of on the job training with the company, which produces and supplies fertiliser for agriculture and salt for road gritting and other uses.

David Lightfoot, Richard Douthwaite, Andrew Dewsbury, Stuart Oswald, Ross Williamson and Adam Cowen will be with Cleveland Potash for the next two years.

During this time, they will complete the company's own competence based programme as well as their Advanced Apprenticeship.

Adam Cowen, 18, from Saltburn, is underground from 6am to 2pm Monday to Friday and said he is surprised by his new environment. "It is much better than I was expecting," he said. "I used to work as a lifeguard at Saltburn Leisure Centre and so was used to heat – although it is much hotter underground than it ever was in the pool! It's like a real community and I'm really enjoying it." Adam said he would like to stay with the company and can see a

Johnson Announces the First National Skills Academies

On 31 October 2006, Education and Skills Secretary Alan Johnson announced the launch of the first three National Skills Academies to drive up the standard of industry training, improve productivity and tackle skills shortages across England.

In addition, Mr Johnson announced the next four sectors that have successfully bid to be part of the National Skills Academy programme.

The launch marks the start of an employer-led, world-class National Skills Academy network to provide vocational education and training for school leavers and adults, tailor made to meet the specific needs of industry sectors and those who work in them.

The first three academies that have been approved and will shortly become operational are in Financial Services, Construction and Manufacturing. A fourth,

representing the food and drink sector is close to being approved.

Bids from the nuclear industry; the chemical industry; the hospitality sector; and the creative and cultural industries have been accepted by the Government and will now be invited to work up business plans ready for the next stage of the process.

The aim is to have up to 12 academies operational by 2008 and the Government is investing £90 million in the programme which will be delivered through the LSC working with employers and their Sector Skills Councils.

Chris Banks, Chair of the LSC said: "Ultimately, we envisage the network will train tens of thousands of learners each year with ambitions to have one for each sector of the economy in place by 2012.

"The benefits to employers are far reaching. The National Skills Academy network will be another route to help ensure consistent high quality training across the country, resulting in a more highly trained and motivated workforce, with improvements to productivity and performance overall."

real future for himself. "I've already learned a lot - and the real learning is still to start," he added. "I feel as though I have a future ahead of me. I've been told that there is a desperate shortage of electricians and I'm planning to stick in and make a career for myself."

Craig Hargreaves, Cleveland Potash Mine's Training Manager, said: "The Apprenticeship programme has been a tremendous success for us and we have just taken on our first group of apprentices as permanent, full time employees, which is fantastic news for all concerned. It's hot and dark underground, and ensuring that new apprentices are comfortable in that environment is important, which is why we get new starters acclimatised straight away. Once they have familiarised themselves, though, the hard work really starts!"

Craig said the company used to have its own apprentice training scheme, but when that stopped, there was a long gap without any apprentices, which has led to skill shortages for the company. "We are now closing the skills gap, with skilled people able to do the jobs and welcoming a new group of apprentices is an exciting time for us. And it's not just the individuals and the company that benefit, all the other employees can see that we are investing in our workers, which is great for morale."

Accompanying the teenagers on their trip underground were Di Hunt and Helen Rainbow from the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership Team, LSC North East. Di and Helen, were keen to see first hand what the Apprenticeship training involves. Cleveland Potash Mine is the only mine of its kind in the United Kingdom, and is East Cleveland's largest employer.

Di Hunt, Partnership Director, said: "The LSC is committed to working with employers in the Tees Valley and this initiative is a prime example of how working together with a local employer and training provider can benefit young people and the local economy. Apprenticeships provide young people with the qualifications they need to succeed in life and employers with a skilled workforce that can hit the ground running. Everyone wins."



(Clockwise from l to r) Di Hunt and Helen Rainbow (LSC), David Lightfoot, Stuart Oswald, Ross Williamson maintenance electrician, and Adam Cowen maintenance electrician.

Train to Gain

Train to Gain and the launch with Coronation Street Stars

Coronation Street favourites Roy and Hayley Cropper were in the region last September to promote the launch of a new service to help businesses compete on the world stage - and learn how their Weatherfield business, "Roy's Rolls," could benefit!

The LSC's Train to Gain service is aimed at helping businesses get the training they need to stay ahead in a competitive business environment by improving the skills of the workforce.

Developed as part of a wider effort by the Regional Skills Partnership in the North East, the Train to Gain service will ensure that integrated skills and business support is available to all local employers.

Coronation Street's favourite employers, Roy and Hayley (actors David Neilson and Julie Hesmondhalgh), took part in Train to Gain's high profile launch event at the Baltic in Gateshead, where representatives from the LSC, the North East Chamber of Commerce, Business Link North East, the CBI and the TUC, talked about how the service will produce better skilled, more motivated and productive teams to help North East organisations succeed in increasingly competitive markets.

Guests were also told how the Train to Gain skills brokerage service, jointly funded by the LSC and Regional Development Agency One NorthEast, will offer impartial advice and match training needs to local learning providers, to ensure that flexible, responsive training programmes are delivered to meet employers' needs.

Some of the assistance offered by the service is eligible for full or partial subsidy, making it ideal for a variety of companies, including smaller businesses like Roy's Rolls.

During their North East tour to promote Train to Gain, the Coronation Street stars also took time out to serve afternoon tea at the newly refurbished Point Break Café in Darlington's Lingfield Point Business Park. While at the cafe, they met with representatives from Station Taxis, whose employees successfully completed a BTEC Award (Level 2) in Transporting Passengers by Taxi and Private Hire as part of the LSC's

Right: Chris Roberts regional director LSC and Julie Hesmondhalgh and David Neilson meet with skills brokers and representatives from key organisations at the Train to Gain breakfast launch event, the Baltic Gateshead.



Employer Training Pilot (known as eQ8), trialled in the North-East since 2004.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director, LSC North East, said: "We are very excited about Train to Gain as we believe it will bring employers a whole new range of high quality support designed to deliver relevant learning in the workplace. Well-trained staff have a measurable impact on performance, on morale and on the bottom line.



Julie and David meet with a representative from Station Taxis.

"Train to Gain makes training much easier for everyone to access. Ultimately, the service marks the beginning of a new and more dynamic way of working with employers, which is designed to put their business and skills development needs first."

Julie Hesmondhalgh (Hayley) said: "The Train to Gain service promises to be a great opportunity for North-East businesses, particularly small companies, as the many different types of training on offer can be

bewildering and making decisions on what's best for your workforce can be time-consuming. The service helps companies by sourcing the most suitable support for their individual needs."

David Neilson (Roy) added: "Julie and I helped launch the LSC's eQ8 programme two-years ago and it is really encouraging to see how many companies have benefited and how many more will benefit from Train to Gain."

Paul Callaghan, Chair of Business Link North East said: "We are delighted to have been chosen to deliver the new Train to Gain service to the businesses of the region. I believe that it is only by raising the skills and performance of our workforce can we achieve our objective of a more productive North East. We look forward to working with the LSC and our other partners to make this happen."

For more information log on to www.traintogain.gov.uk



Train to Gain the service

Train to Gain supersedes the Employer Training Pilot (ETP) and many employers are already benefitting from the new service.

Train to Gain skills brokers are working throughout the region, meeting and liaising with training providers to identify relevant training and development programmes.

A core element of Train to Gain is an offer of fully funded Skills for Life and first Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Although open to all employers, Train to Gain is being aimed particularly at "hard to reach" companies, such as those who have not previously taken up the Employer Training Pilot which has operated in the region since 2004, or that do not have Investors In People status.

In the North East the LSC and One NorthEast are working closely with other agencies to ensure that the design and delivery of Train to Gain is fully integrated with other types of support on offer to business.

Train to Gain will also provide:

- A comprehensive analysis of an organisation's training needs.
- Easy access to relevant, flexible, high quality training, delivered mostly in the workplace.
- Information and support to access a wide range of training packages.
- Information and advice to employees on qualifications and training, eligibility, financial support, future skill needs.
- Support to address future training needs, which are aligned to the business objectives.



Staff from Budget Windows celebrating Level 2 qualifications.

Train to Gain at Budget Windows in Stockton on Tees

The future is clear for the entire production workforce at a Stockton-on-Tees window company who have just been awarded with qualifications to benefit themselves and the company.

Some 90 employees from Budget Windows have gained Level 2 qualifications through the LSC's Train to Gain service. Managing Director Graham Jenney recently presented a group of the workers with their certificates and congratulated them on their success.

The men, ranging from 19 to 60, received Glass Qualifications Authority NVQ Level 2 qualifications in Glass Processing (making the double glazed units), Production of Glass Supporting Fabrication (making the frames) and Fenestration Installation (fitting the frames). For some of the men,



it was the first time they had gained formal qualifications and Managing Director Mr Jenney said he has been very impressed with the co-operation of the workers.

He said: "All the staff involved in the manufacturing process have taken part in the training and they have all been very positive about it. I am firmly committed to training, ensuring my workers are equipped with the skills to enable them to do the job to the best of their ability. Our company is also committed to first class customer care and ensuring our workers are skilled in what they do enables us to offer a quality service to our customers, which benefits everyone."

The qualifications will enable the men to gain the industry recognised CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) card which proves competency in their chosen trade and has become the construction industry standard.

Mike White, NVQ Assessor with Ucatt/IVS, the training provider that provided the training, said when he approached the company, it was clear that this was going to be a challenge. "This has been a large scale project due to the large numbers of staff involved and it has taken a year to complete," he said. "We are delighted to have provided training and support to enhance the success of this established local company. When we started, we had a group of men who were a bit unsure about themselves and when we finished, the same group of people were positive about their future, armed with recognised qualifications."

More than 800 employers in the region have benefited from learning through the service since it was launched in April and some 4,084 individuals have benefited.

Chris Roberts, regional director, LSC North East, added: "The benefits of Train to Gain to the employer and to the employee make it such a fantastic service for organisations of all shapes and sizes. To see so many individuals from one company involved with Train to Gain is a real pleasure and proof that employers and individuals are increasingly seeing the benefit training brings, both for staff morale and company performance."

To find out more tel: 0800 083 3312.

Reducing Re-offending and Acklington Prison in Northumberland

A North East prison is the first in the country to pilot a new training programme aimed at helping offenders turn their lives around and make a valuable contribution to society.

The first group of inmates at HMP Acklington have completed the LSC funded course, which will enable them to work as cable jointers for utility companies. The men are hopeful that their newly acquired skills will help them find work when they are released and reduce the risk of them re-offending. So popular was the course that one of the men asked to stay in prison to complete the qualification rather than leave on his Home Detention Curfew release date!

Of the eight men who completed the course, aimed mainly at the telecom industry, two have been released, one of whom is in work and the other on work experience, and the others are looking forward to putting into practice what they have learned. One man, Gavin Kerr, is due to be released after being in prison for 16 months and says while the course was hard work, he's confident that it will make a real difference to his prospects on the outside.

Gavin, 28, from Sunderland, was sent to prison for assault. He said that while he did commit crime when he was young, once he trained as a mechanic, he stayed out of trouble. The crime for which he is now in prison was, he says, a stupid mistake and when he is released he wants to stay out of trouble.

"Doing this course has really improved my chances of getting a job once I'm released and ensuring that I stay out of trouble," he said. "I have worked in most of the workshops in the prison but this is the course that helps you actually get a job when you get out. Finding work will give me security and a sense of purpose. The course has also improved my confidence and ability to work as part of a team. The course was demanding and we had homework most nights but it has been really worthwhile. I was really committed to completing it successfully and am committed to making sure I don't end up back in here."

The eight men were recently presented with certificates at a presentation

ceremony in the prison, which was also attended by Mitch Egan, Regional Offender Manager, North East offenders learning and skills board, Paul Willis, LSC, the training provider, Energy Utility and Skills and a number of employers interested in becoming involved with the scheme. Gavin said that as a result of this, he may have an interview set up when he is released.

Elaine Llewellyn, HMP Acklington Head of Industries, said: "This had been a huge learning curve for all concerned. We thank the employers and trainers for giving HMP Acklington the chance to prove that projects such as this can be successfully undertaken by prisoners."

Energy and Utility Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the utility industry, set up the programme after hearing from employers that there was a shortage of cable jointers nationally. They worked with Enterprise Plc, the utility company offering the men work experience on release.

Another of the learners, who doesn't want to be named, said he never expected to get into trouble and be sent to prison. "You get all walks of life in here and people with a variety of skills," he said. "There is a real stigma attached to being an ex offender and it is hard to get a job when you are on the outside, an important factor to helping you stay on the straight and narrow. Just because I have made one mistake, doesn't mean I don't deserve a second chance. I hope that this course has given me that."

The LSC is responsible for the new Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), which brings together learning and skills for offenders in custody and in the community. The men received a number of qualifications including an NVQ Level 2 in Cable Jointing, Level 3 qualifications in Cable Testing and Fault Finding and Pole Erection and Overhead Cabling, NRASWA and also qualifications in health and safety and first aid."



Gavin Kerr from Sunderland, completing LSC funded course at Acklington Prison.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director, LSC North East, believes education has an important role to play in reducing re-offending. He said: "Developing skills enhances the employment prospects of offenders, reducing the risk of them re-offending. Ensuring offenders are able to access education will ensure they are given the best possible chances to turn their lives around and will also help supply the region's employers with a skilled workforce."

The course involved 14 weeks of full time study and covered all aspects, practical and theory, of working on the BT cable network. As part of the course, the prison had to have two six metre telegraph pole erected in the prison for the practical work. Garry Budge, Assistant Industrial Manager explained that there were several security issues that needed to be addressed before the work commenced due to the nature of the work and size of the poles but it has all been worthwhile. He said: "All the men on the course have worked really hard and made a big success of it. They all wanted to learn and see this as a real opportunity for them and a chance to make a go of life on the outside."

Stephen Rawlinson, Head of Communications for Enterprise, said: "Enterprise has been happy to be involved with this training programme. We are



expanding and have a real need for skilled workers who are prepared to work hard - and that is what we believe we will get through this training scheme. The course was tailored to meet our requirements, which means that the men will be able to start work as soon as they are released.

"Our company is a great supporter of local communities and we want to provide opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background. There is a stigma attached to ex-offenders, but we do not see any reason why this group should be excluded from employment. They have served their time and we believe they deserve a second chance. In many cases, people who are given a second chance are more likely to work hard to take advantage of the opportunities available to them."

Gillian Brown, Regional Contracts Manager for Energy and Utility Skills, said the programme has been a huge success with recruitment for the next course due to start next month. She said: "The learner who now has a job is over the moon and feels that this is the start of a new career and a new life for him. This training programme provides offenders with a chance to make a success of their lives and thanks to employers coming on board, it can only go from strength to strength. We are planning to run another course next year to train General Network Operatives for utility companies."

Equipping learners with learning and/or disabilities to progress

Issues affecting vulnerable people always grab headlines and that's why recent stories both nationally and in the North East about cuts in courses for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are high on the news agenda.

Provision for this group of learners is not only high on the news agenda, but on the agenda of all those concerned with ensuring that the learning needs of this group of learners are met.

The LSC published its national strategy for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in response to the Little Review, which focused on barriers to participation and achievement. A review is also currently being carried out in the North East, looking at local provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the findings of which were presented in October. These findings, along with the national strategy, will help shape the North East Regional Strategy and the future of provision for this group of learners.

Chris Roberts said: "There have been cuts to some courses in the region and while I fully appreciate that this has caused some distress, the LSC has an important job to do and we mustn't lose sight of this. Our aim is to equip young people and adults with the skills they need to be personally fulfilled and ensure that our employers have a skilled workforce to enable them to compete on the world stage. Our colleges are charged with helping us achieve this aim and in order to do this, have to ensure that learners progress."

The LSC is focused on a number of key government priorities and provision for learners, of all ages, with learning difficulties and/or disabilities remains a priority. Meeting the learning needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is not only a legal requirement but a chosen priority.

Chris Roberts added: "One thing is for sure, provision for people with learning difficulties should challenge them, provide them with a sense of achievement and deliver progression to new opportunities and experiences. Education is not day care and to keep this

group in learning simply to occupy them doesn't serve their interest or serve the interest of the North East as a whole. It will not support their integration into local communities or help them progress to greater independence. Would we keep adults without learning difficulties or disabilities on courses without challenge or purpose? No. Different expectations for those with learning difficulties only reinforces their ambitions as second class."

The FE sector has to provide appropriate programmes that have both a clear pathway to learning or employment and meet the needs of all learners. Colleges continually review their provision in the light of changing needs and, as a result, some programmes will legitimately come to an end. In developing an FE system that is responsive to demand, challenging and delivers the highest quality, change is a vital component. And change can often be hard to take and can be seen as the wrong move.

If learning programmes come to an end because learners are not progressing, provision is poor and not meeting the learners' needs or because alternative provision would better meet their needs, then this is right. The LSC should not fund courses that are not learning focused as this would equate to day care being delivered in an FE environment. While we fully support the pressure some colleges are under due to a shift in government priorities, we agree that they should not unilaterally end this type of provision. Collaborative deployment of public funding is the government's provision for children's services and the LSC's preferred model for services for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The new national and regional strategies will be ambitious and rightly so. Change is needed and we must be ambitious in supporting the goals of all our learners, employers and communities as a whole.

The Adult Learning Grant launch with 'Big Brother' Craig Phillips

TV presenter Craig Phillips made a whistle stop tour of the North East back in August to give some Big Brotherly advice to the region's workforce.

The winner of Channel 4's first ever Big Brother urged workers to use learning as a way to create life changing opportunities which will open the door to better paid employment and an improved lifestyle.

The 35-year-old is living proof that learning into adulthood is the way to get on in life. Craig, who has dyslexia, left school at 15 with no GCSEs to become a butcher boy, he studied for City and Guild qualifications to break into construction and set up his own business. He used his Big Brother appearance in 2000 to secure TV work as a DIY expert.

And that's why he backed an LSC campaign to encourage North East workers to return to learning with the support of an Adult Learning Grant, an allowance of up to £30 per week, which can help with things like travel, books and materials.

Craig joined Chris Roberts, LSC Regional Director, to launch the initiative, saying: "When I left school, I went straight in to work and never thought I might need qualifications. But I soon realised that if I wanted more options and opportunities in life I would need to study to get them.

"Learning while earning is fun and being able to get a grant to help cover the cost is a great incentive. I hope as many people as possible can take advantage of this offer and change their lives for the better as a result." Chris Roberts added: "It is essential that as many people as possible are able to develop their skills in order to give themselves the best possible opportunity of improving their life chances. We have made huge progress in raising skill levels for the benefit of individuals and employers and initiatives like the ALG can make a big difference.

"Craig is a perfect example of what people can achieve when they continue to learn after starting work. The experience not only qualified him to enter a profession which interested him – it also built confidence and allowed his entrepreneurial spirit to flourish."

The grant is available to anyone over 19 aiming to study for at least 12 hours per week for a first full Level 2 or 3 qualification - including GCSEs, A Levels and NVQs. It can significantly offset the costs of study and does not affect household benefits - including child benefit, housing benefit and tax credits.

To find out more about Adult Learning Grant call 08000 319 050 or visit www.adultlearninggrant.com

Below: Chris Roberts LSC and TV Presenter Craig Phillips launch initiative to encourage North East workers back to learning.



EMA and the student potential in the North East

Every summer hundreds and possibly thousands of North East students quit education at 16 – not because they want to, but because they think they have to.

Family and personal circumstances can often mean that a place at college seems just a step too far because of the extra cost of travel and equipment.

The result is that many end up in unskilled and poorly paid jobs and a vast amount of potential is lost to the region's shrinking labour market. Over the course of their

working lives these young people earn an estimated £185,000 less than school friends who go on to study for A levels or other Level 3 qualifications.

But there is a way for many of these school leavers to continue in education and fulfil their true potential. The LSC Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of up to £30

per week is available for young people from households with incomes of £30,000 or less who stay in learning. EMA doesn't affect the other benefits received by the family.

The means-tested payments – which are a grant and not a loan – can help cover the additional cost of an education in both academic and vocational subjects. In addition, for those demonstrating good attendance and commitment, bonus payments are on offer.

Having been piloted in parts of the North East, EMA was rolled out nationwide two years ago. Take up in the region has been good with the numbers exceeding initial estimates. This year 24,687 students took advantage of the grant.

Stacey Ghent is convinced her dreams of a life in the spotlights would have blown a fuse without the help of the EMA grant which enabled her to continue her studies. The money she received each week meant she was able to travel from her South Shields home to study for a national diploma in drama in Newcastle.

Without it Stacey, 20, believes the boards she'd be treading would be in an office or a shop rather than on a West End stage, which is where she feels her destiny lies. "I know my family would have tried to help out but really that money made all the difference," she said: "It meant I could follow a dream I have had since I was eight years old and attend a college with one of the best reputations for performing arts."

Chris Roberts, Regional Director, LSC North East, said: "It is essential that as many people as possible are able to continue their education in order to give themselves the best possible opportunity of securing a job that makes the most of their skills, which they enjoy and which gives them more earning potential.

"This will also help improve the qualifications and skills of the region's workforce at a time when there are more experienced people retiring than new starters entering the labour market. Something as simple as EMA, which offers a little help towards further education costs, can achieve all this."

To find out more about EMA call freephone 080 810 16 2 19, log on to www.ema.dfes.gov.uk.

Skills for Life training and Kay Moore from Middlesbrough

Animal lover Kay Moore is well on her way to a dream career providing creature comforts thanks to an LSC supported training programme.

Studying hard, as well as caring for her three pet rats, has helped Kay, 35 from Middlesbrough, to overcome a period of ill health and regain confidence.

Keen to start a national diploma in animal management, Kay was thwarted by a lack of qualifications. Unsure what to do, she visited her local Learning Shop which provides advice and facilities for anyone wishing to progress in their career. After an assessment, she was identified as an ideal candidate for the LSC Skills for Life scheme.

With the support of Learning Shop staff, Kay quickly achieved four NVQs, including maths and English, which has opened up a new world to her that she didn't think possible.

"I had lost all hope of achieving my lifelong ambition to work with animals because I just didn't have the qualifications required," she said: "Thanks to Skills for Life, I have now started a national diploma in animal management at Middlesbrough College. I never thought this would be possible but now my dreams are turning into a reality! I can hardly believe it."

Kay's daughter Niamh and pet rats Tom, Dick and Harry have also played a key role in Kay's progress which, upon completion of her diploma, could lead to a supervisory or management position in a wide range of sectors such as animal sanctuaries and surgeries.

LSC's Regional Director Chris Roberts said: "Skills for Life has helped thousands of adults to develop in a professional and personal capacity. It's great to hear about people who have really benefited from the support we provide. Kay's example shows that there is always a way forward in terms of learning and that with a little help from the LSC you can achieve goals you never thought possible."

Skills for Life is the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy and was launched by the Government in 2001. It aims to improve significantly the literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), and language (ESOL) skills of adults in England.

For more information about Skills for Life, contact freephone 0800 100 900.

e2e and Goalkeeper Kevin Morton from Northumberland



Kevin Morton, 17 from Blyth.

Goalkeeper Kevin Morton was not sure which of his options to save when Grimsby Town Football Club called him up for a trial.

The chance to break into the professional game was clearly one not to be missed. But heading for Humberside would mean giving the red card to the LSC funded e2e (entry to employment) construction course he'd just begun.

Not wanting to pay the penalty of having nothing to fall back on if the football didn't work out, Kevin, 17 from Blyth, approached his training provider, Northumberland Training Agency, for help.

And Training Officer Ann Harrington had just the answer. She arranged for Kevin to put in some extra time on the course so that he could complete it early – re-organised his programme to allow him to train for the football trial and even secured some financial help to buy new kit.

The result was that Kevin travelled to Grimsby with a joinery qualification and in

good shape for the challenge, which he met to secure an apprenticeship with The Mariners. If all goes well he will be offered a professional contract with the club in the New Year.

"I can't thank Ann enough for all her help," said Kevin: "She really sorted things out for me and without that I don't think I would have been able to grasp this opportunity. I came here determined and relaxed, knowing I enjoyed joinery and could always return to it if I didn't make the grade.

"So far everything is going well. My coaches are pleased with my progress and I am really enjoying the training and the playing. I just have to keep working hard to make the most of this chance."

Added Ann Harrington: "Kevin has worked extremely hard and deserves the opportunity he's been given. We all wish him well and hope, one day, to be

watching him play in the Premiership."

Chris Roberts, Regional Director of LSC North East, said: "Whatever happens, woodwork seems sure to be a key part of Kevin's future – between the sticks or in the construction industry. Either way, training will play a big part in his career."

e2e is a highly supportive learning programme for 16-18 year olds who are not quite ready for an Apprenticeship, employment or further education. It is individually tailored to each young person to address their needs and help them achieve their goals.

Increased Flexibility and Naomi Goldsmith from Northumberland

It never gets too hot in the kitchen for Naomi Goldsmith who has just won a prestigious cookery competition.

The 15 year old schoolgirl from Sunderland has become a celebrity chef in her own right after gaining the highest overall individual marks in an inter-college cookery competition.

It was Naomi's fresh scones that tipped the scales in her favour. Not only did she win her category, but her cheese scones and cherry scones scored top marks, which placed her way beyond all the other would-be chefs in all other categories.

Catering students from eight different northern colleges including Newcastle, Tyneside Metropolitan, South Tyneside, Darlington, Liverpool, Sunderland and Middlesbrough took part in the Salon Culinaire at Gateshead Leisure Centre on 17 May. There were 16 different competition classes in all.

Naomi is a pupil at Redhouse School - a partner with Sunderland College - and travels to Sunderland College for cookery classes every Wednesday morning as part of her LSC funded Increased Flexibility Programme for 14-16 year olds. She was thrilled to win and says it's made it easy for her to choose her future career - to be a chef of course! She's not sure what the magic ingredients were in her scones, or perhaps she's not telling - but she says she had lots of support from her tutor Geoff McVay, at Sunderland College. Along with 11 other students on this programme, she's also studying for NVQ Level 1 Catering and hopes to gain this in June 2007.

Naomi does a lot of cooking at home and particular, likes cooking Sunday lunch for her gran, who lives alone. She'd like to be a chef in a restaurant and maybe even one day run her own place.

Other students from Sunderland College excelled in the competition including Jade Kilty who is on the intermediate chef's programme and who won the Larder Fish Preparation live class. Christopher Beacon is on the advanced chef's programme and gained third place in the Restaurant main course class.



Naomi Goldsmith, 15 from Sunderland.

The Increased Flexibility Programme was introduced in 2002 in order to "create enhanced vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14-16 year olds who can benefit most" and is delivered via a series of partners.

The partnership approach aims to increase students' skills and knowledge, develop their social learning and increase the numbers remaining in education and training after 16.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director, LSC North East, commented: "As Naomi shows, the Increased Flexibility Programme is having a very positive effect on the 14-16 year olds who participate in it. The Increased Flexibility Programme is not only enhancing pupils' skills and job opportunities, but it's also improving their confidence and communication skills and giving them a broader outlook on the possibilities and opportunities available to them."

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