

# Countdown

a weekly email briefing distributed  
to work-based learning providers

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## **'One voice' representing the providers of quality workforce development skills**

Working with government, and employers to develop policies and deliver high quality, learner centred, employer focussed, demand-led skills development, valued by all.

### **ALP's Train to Gain 'smoothing proposals' fall on deaf ears**

ALP members caught in the Train to Gain funding debacle have shown incredible patience whilst ALP has persevered with constant high level discussions seeking ways of 'smoothing' Train to Gain delivery during the next eight months until fresh money is made available for the 2010-11 financial year. Reluctantly ALP has had to admit that following this lengthy period of talks all of their proposals to develop a sensible set of arrangements to allow delivery levels to be carefully 'smoothed' over the period have come to nought.

ALP Chief Executive, Graham Hoyle comments, "Despite non-stop, open and frank discussions with the LSC during the last three months no progress has been made."

ALP's suggestion that providers maintain delivery (in response to employer demand) from August to March, claiming payments between April and July – when there otherwise will be more money available than can be sensibly and effectively spent - has been turned down.

A further suggestion, that funds from the Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) budget should be temporarily transferred (vired) to the Employer Responsive (Train to Gain) budget, was apparently submitted to ministers, but ALP is told has been turned down in favour of a much more limited option which would allow only those providers in receipt of ALR to temporarily vire such funds into Train to Gain.

Graham Hoyle comments, "Enabling some providers to smooth their delivery in this way would normally be supported, however to offer this facility to well under half of all Train to Gain providers will skew the market in a totally unfair and unacceptable way, dramatically disadvantaging most providers – and all their customers. They will still have to make redundancies, turn away employers, renege on employer contracts and dramatically scale back their operations by March 2010, to be in exactly the wrong shape to utilise the increased Train to Gain budget available from 1st April. We believe such a decision could well be a breach of competition rules and I have asked BIS this week to confirm whether this is indeed their decision, and to explain the rationale behind it. I have also pointed out that I anticipate a whole raft of complaints from providers, and even more importantly the employers they are being prevented from serving if it is confirmed that this is the path the Government has decided to tread. Hopefully it is not too late to enact a solution which addresses everyone's difficulties, not just a favoured few."

### **Year 2 Apprentices accepted on foundation degree courses**

At a visit to the Far East 'Humber' region this week Graham Hoyle visited three separate provider units both north and south of the river delivering high quality engineering/electrical Apprenticeships for major local companies including household names like Corus. The three units are all managed by ALP member HETA, one of the original GTAs set up over forty years ago.

One of the most significant findings of the visit transpired when Graham met with two year one Apprentices, who having left school at 16 with a good clutch of A-C GCSEs, had during their first year fully covered their basic skills, technical certificate and NVQ 2 in highly technical subjects.

Impressive though this was, the significant find was that one of them was moving in year two onto an HNC course of study, with the second one moving on to a foundation degree with Hull University, both of course are still only 17. These were not one-off, unique students, this was the model increasingly being followed by HETA Apprentices and they were on a longer term strategy which would see young Apprentices progressing during their Apprenticeship onto foundation degree modules, with many of course likely to move on to full honours degrees thereafter, sponsored by their company.

Graham comments, "Those of us involved in work based learning, and specifically Apprenticeships, have always known that many of 'our youngsters' are more than capable of setting off at 16 on a route to HE. It has been the world of education/academia, and indeed the majority of HE institutions themselves (and of course most secondary schools) who have failed to believe that this was the case other than for a few exceptional players on the periphery. If HETA's **progression plans** are delivered – as I believe they will be, we may yet have some hard evidence with which to challenge the long held prejudices of the world of (non-WBL) education. Watch this space."

Of course HETA's experience, successes and strategy are not unique. If you have been on this track please let ALP know and Countdown will happily cover your situation as we stoke up afresh the battle to place work based learning – and Apprenticeships – where they need to be within the world of education and training.

### **ALP members draw up messages for Conservative frontbench**

ALP Chief Executive, Graham Hoyle, chaired a lively meeting this week involving a cross section of ALP members drawn from the north east, north west, far south west and all points in between. A wide range of issues were raised which need to be fed into the Opposition frontbench team, including many of course that have already been raised.

The two main issues were firstly the importance of explaining the impracticality of channelling Apprenticeship funding through employers; a plan destined to turn off the majority of SMEs who currently employ apprentices, as well as dissuading new employers to sign up apprentices. Secondly, we need to produce a radical proposal which will encompass the need for pre-Apprenticeship training for the growing number of youngsters as yet unable to find employers because of the current recession. This should address the growth in demand as the age of participation is raised and cover the growing E2E cohort, as well as responding to future skill needs articulated by the assessments being made by Regional Development Agencies. The proposal must have at the core the involvement of employers and the full utilisation of work based learning, and indeed workplace learning, whilst bridging the gap until employers are able to fully resume fully employed Apprenticeships.

ALP's National Policy Manager, Judy Brandon, was charged at the meeting to draw up two draft papers for wider consultation with members throughout the summer, with the aim of distributing them and hopefully discussing them with the Opposition frontbench during the autumn.

### **LSC Electronic Records Project**

The LSC held a meeting earlier this week to update ALP on a project they are undertaking to develop a framework for 'acceptable' use of electronic records by providers.

A number of ALP members, who are currently engaged in the development of electronic records, have volunteered to be included in testing the framework, which is likely to take place in the autumn 09. The project will develop and test the framework with a range of providers, ensuring that post Machinery of Government requirements are reflected in the framework. One element of the project for development is to provide verification of learner identity. This will include consideration of electronic signatures of various kinds.

Chris Swingler, ALP's Director of Business Development attended the briefing said 'The good news is the LSC are making progress with the framework development, however it is clear the complexities of the development are such that it is unlikely the framework will be available for the sector until later next year.'

A report will be produced early next year with recommendations for the approach, standards and tools that could be adopted by the LSC/SFA. The report will also identify associated risks and issues with rolling out the approach on a larger scale.

### **ALP calls for large-scale response to surging youth unemployment**

The latest unemployment figures show that the total number of people out of work is now touching 2.4 million. In the last quarter, the number of employed 16-17 year olds fell by 7%, which was significantly greater than that for other age groups, and 30% of that age group are now unemployed. Published alongside the official data was a report from the Audit Commission which accused some local authorities of being unimaginative in their response to the effects of the recession. In March, ALP published proposals for tackling unemployment, which were reported in the Financial Times. These included a call for a new Community Programme for young people and adults linked to Apprenticeships, new industries and the environment. ALP believes that the scale of the recession means that urgent consideration should be given to implementing such a programme. The ALP paper can be downloaded [here](#)

### **Learning Innovation Grant (LIG) Phase 4 Final Evaluation Report**

Following on from the success of LIG Phase 1, 2 & 3, ALP has recently uploaded the LIG Phase 4 final evaluation report to the ALP e-learning website at [www.elearningproviders.org](http://www.elearningproviders.org). The evidence & feedback received from LIG Phase 4 clearly shows the ongoing appetite of the skills sector to adopt new technology to support innovation in teaching and learning.

Simon Hurd, ALP's LIG Contract Manager, said: "It is encouraging to see the continuing positive view from LIG Phase 4 providers regarding the impact of their projects on supporting the longer term aims of increasing retention & achievement levels across the skills sector."

ALP is pleased to confirm the continuation of the LIG programme. The LIG 5 prospectus will be available from the first week in September with further details to be announced over the summer via Countdown and various other channels.

### **£330,000 available to support new research projects**

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) has announced it is making £330,000 available to fund two strands of research projects. The first LSIS scheme, Leadership Practitioner Research Programme 2009-10, will fund up to 10 leadership-themed research projects, each being allocated £20,000. Directed by Lancaster University Management School, the subject areas expected to be covered are leadership and learning; leadership challenges in times of reduced public provision; leadership, community and social cohesion, and developing and maintaining effective governance.

Practitioners interested in the LSIS Leadership Practitioner Research Programme can visit <http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel/tender0910/> for further information.

The second funding stream is from the LSIS Bursary Scheme. The sum of £130,000 is being offered by LSIS to support research that can be translated into practical messages to help teachers, tutors and trainers develop as professionals and ensure that every learner has an excellent learning experience. This second scheme will be run in partnership with the Institute for learning (IfL) to strengthen the link between practitioners' research activity and its contribution to professional development. This bursary scheme is looking for projects that examine ways that the learning and skills sector can respond to the economic downturn and prepare for recovery. Prospective applicants are invited to visit the research section on Excellence Gateway <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/research> to register their interest in receiving further information about the bursaries when they become available later in the summer.

### **Training Quality Standard Awareness Day**

The CfA will be hosting a 'TQS Awareness Day' in London, on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2009 for Providers who are about to embark on application process. To help you successfully complete the

TQS application process, please click on the link below to find out more and to register to attend: [http://www.cfa.uk.com/events/TQS\\_september](http://www.cfa.uk.com/events/TQS_september).

### **ILR consultation goes live (on behalf of *the Information authority*)**

The submissions for requesting changes to the 2010/11 Individualised Learner Record (ILR) are now closed and *the information authority* received 58 change requests in total. Those that met *the information authority's* criteria are being taken forward for consultation over the summer.

Details of the change requests will soon be published on *the information authority* website and on **feconnect** – an online community portal – where IA collects comment from colleagues in FE and training. These comments will help to shape the decisions made by the *information authority's* board when it considers the change requests in September. To keep in touch with the development of the 2010/11 ILR, please subscribe to IA [web alerts](#). For full information on the process please see <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/RequestforChange>. If you have any queries, please email [cst@theia.org.uk](mailto:cst@theia.org.uk) or telephone 024 7682 5658.

### **Summer of Skills Campaign - (On behalf of the LSC)**

The Summer of Skills, nationwide campaign led by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was launch this month and will focus on the value of skills and breaking down the barriers to learning.

The highlights of the campaign include the new Skills for Life 'Get On' television and radio advertising promotion; a football chant competition, where members of the public write new chants for their favourite teams, judged by John Barnes and Barnsley FC's poet-in-residence Ian McMillan and the LSC's Career Advice Service (CAS) launch of a national PR campaign commencing 24 August focusing on 'What did you want to be when you were growing up?'

A free Five Step Guide to the Summer of Skills is available to download from the Campaign Resources Site (CRS). All of LSC's national marketing campaign materials, including 'Our future. It's in our hands' branding collateral, press release templates, images and advertising posters can also be downloaded free of charge from the CRS website. To receive a copy of the NEW Guide to the CRS, or to keep up-to-date with the latest Skills Campaign developments by subscribing to the Skills Update monthly e-Newsletter, email [skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk) or call 020 7419 7335.