

**Association of Learning Providers
Press release – 11 November 2009**

**‘Politicians must hold their nerve on open and demand-led skills training’, says
Association of Learning Providers on National Skills Strategy**

The trade organisation, which represents vocational learning and training providers, has welcomed the National Skills Strategy published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and urges the frontbenches of all three main political parties to support the principles of demand-led funding and an open supply market in the face of tighter public expenditure.

Responding to today’s Skills Strategy, ALP was happy to support the broad thrust of the document, in particular, the acceptance and adoption of many key strategies that ALP has been arguing for, for some time. The decision to offer all training providers, other than poorly performing ones, much greater flexibility in managing their budgets to meet local and employer demand will not only simplify an over-bureaucratic system, but will lead to better targeted and more effective delivery.

It was heartening to see a proposal made earlier this year by ALP finding its way into government policy, which now acknowledges that purely counting qualifications as the sole basis for PSA targets is far too narrow. A much more sophisticated analysis of skills development, and its impact on productivity and personal development and effectiveness, is now to be introduced.

Accepting the proposals from UKCES to rationalise the vast number of publicly funded ‘intermediary bodies’ also builds on arguments made by ALP over several years. Also applauded was the need to further strengthen the coming together of the previously separate levels of skills support for the unemployed and the employed. As recently as two years ago ALP was a lone voice in arguing what is now a core strategy for not only this government, but also the main Opposition.

Developing individual skill accounts to put more power and choice into the hands of consumers is also an overdue initiative, and the proposals to simplify further the vast array of quality standards and often incoherent performance measures also moves us a step closer to a more simplified and effective system.

ALP Chief Executive, Graham Hoyle, comments, “These developments, however, must be substantially led by providers themselves, who will be even more robust in terms of self expectation than officials or politicians. ALP, in conjunction with the Association of Colleges, will continue to push hard for greater provider influence in this critical area.

“The re-confirmation of the priority to develop and grow Apprenticeships is of course absolutely right, as is the continuing emphasis on securing basic skills and vocational skills for all up to at least NVQ level 2. Also welcome is the commitment to strengthen the

opportunity for Apprentices to enter higher education in a much more structured and simplified way than at present.

“Overall, a solid paper which gains ALP’s broad support, but undoubtedly the detailed discussions that follow will ultimately determine its effectiveness or otherwise. It does, at the present time, read as a long list of worthy aspirations. I suspect, however, that the availability of resources over the next few years will necessitate a prioritisation which may in parts prove controversial and painful.”

ENDS

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Notes to editors

1. About the Association of Learning Providers

The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) is the leading trade association for vocational learning and employment providers in Britain. The majority of its 455 members are independent private, not-for-profit and voluntary sector training organisations. Membership is open to any provider committed to quality vocational learning and it includes over 60 FE colleges involved in work based learning. ALP members train a significant majority of the apprentices in England and are the major deliverers of New Deal and Train to Gain contracts on behalf of government. More information is available at: www.learningproviders.org.uk .