

**Association of Learning Providers press release  
in response to Ofsted annual report 2008-09  
24 November 2009**

**Training providers call for 'preferred supplier' system to safeguard quality**

The publicly funded FE and skills system should be using preferred suppliers to help deliver high quality training to employers and individual learners, says the trade body representing vocational learning providers in response to today's annual report from Ofsted.

The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) welcomes the generally positive picture reported by the Chief Inspector on work based learning (WBL) in England. It also notes her findings on the overall effectiveness of WBL delivery being not as good as last year, but at the same time points out that the report says that the growth in the Train to Gain programme has meant that almost half of the inspections this year have been of providers offering Train to Gain only, as opposed to a mixture of well-established WBL provision, such as Apprenticeships where success rates continue to rise.

According to Ofsted, the sample inspected this year includes a larger proportion of new providers than in 2007/08. ALP says that this covers new providers of variable quality entering the system to deliver the Train to Gain programme only. These providers tend to remain 'invisible' until the Ofsted inspectors arrive and find that many of them were undoubtedly ill-prepared for delivering a quality service in the publicly funded arena.

The Association is naturally concerned about the reputational damage to independent WBL providers that will arise simply because 600 new providers have been allowed into the sector with little consideration to the impact on quality and the success rates likely to be achieved by these providers.

Graham Hoyle OBE, ALP's chief executive, said: "I have long argued that new providers to the system should be vetted with more rigour before they are let in and that once in, they should be monitored much more closely until they have established a track-record of good performance.

"Future problems could be avoided if the new Skills Funding Agency introduced preferred supplier arrangements which safeguard quality and cut costs, while still allowing properly vetted new entrants into the skills market."

**ALP members deliver good quality training**

ALP has undertaken a study of the inspection results for independent work based learning providers in the 12-month period covered by the Ofsted report and has been reassured that the results of its own members, many of whom have been in the publicly funded system for a long time, generally compare more favourably than those achieved by non-member independent providers. On achieving outstanding grades, ALP members performed significantly better than WBL providers generally.

It should be noted that it is a more of a challenge for providers with more than one training centre to obtain outstanding or good grades than single-centre institutions.

ALP is pleased for its members that Ofsted makes positive observations about the delivery of the New Deal in a very tough economic climate, especially in relation to promoting the self-employment option, and also about offender learning and skills.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

1. 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](http://www.learningproviders.org.uk) .