Building employer relationships: what do employers want from providers?

Linking London LLN

Report
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FINAL
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Commissioned by Sue Betts, Director of Linking London, on behalf of the members of the Network
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Executive Summary

Background

1 This report was commission by Sue Betts, Director of the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network. It’s based on research that provides further insights into what employers need and want from education and training providers and explores how providers can successfully engage with businesses. The report builds on our initial report entitled, ‘The Demand for higher level skills in Inner London’.

2 Since our initial research, the economy has entered turbulent times. Not only are businesses struggling to survive, the political back drop is also somewhat uncertain, with a general election pending next year. One thing that is certain is, with mounting Government debt, the higher education sector is likely to face funding cuts. This could mean that private investment and engagement with businesses will be even more critical in the future.

3 A total of 16 employers took part in a telephone consultation during September and October 2009. The employers were drawn from a sample of businesses that employ 50 or more employees, and are mainly based within private sector organisations within Linking London’s catchment area.

Key Findings

Demand for training

- Businesses train because there is a clear business case to do so. They invest in a range of accredited and non-accredited training such as:
  
  (a) staff induction;
  
  (b) training to achieve and maintain accreditation from a professional body;
  
  (c) training to keep up-to-date with developments in the sector; and
  
  (d) ad-hoc training to address individual employees training needs, identified during the Appraisal process.

- The level of training undertaken is determined by a ‘need’ to train to a specific level such as: up-skilling an employee’s current qualifications, meeting industry regulations, or ensuring an employee possesses the skills necessary for a specific job-role.

- The delivery of training varies according to the type of training but is mainly undertaken in-house by internal staff or external providers.
Impact of the recession:

- Very few employers have cut training as a result of the recession. Instead they are changing the way training is delivered, undertaking more in-house training using their own resources. External training is subject to greater scrutiny and providers must ensure they deliver ‘value for money’.

Choosing a provider

- The ‘choice’ of provider is often constrained by the availability of a suitable provider capable of delivering specialist training requirements in the local area, as well as by procurement procedures and/or regulations.

- While cost can impact on provider choice, quality is often the overriding factor. Employers judge the quality of training in different ways, but mainly base their decision on prior experience of the provider. Not all employers understand or take account of quality marks such as Investors in People (IiP).

- Employers value the opportunity to build a relationship with a provider over the long-term. In this way, providers develop a better understanding of each individual business area and this enables them to better tailor training to the employer’s needs.

- While some businesses have systems in place to record their interactions with training providers, taking into account employee feedback, others rely on the memory and prior experience of the individuals responsible for organising the training.

Engaging with providers

- Some employers perceive colleges and universities in particular, to be academically-focused, inflexible and unable to provide bespoke training that meets their requirements. Challenging these perceptions and raising awareness of the ways in which colleges and universities can respond to the needs of business is a key priority for those seeking to engage with employers.

- Strategies to engage with employers include:

  (a) effective marketing;

  (b) developing and maintaining relationships; and

  (c) reviewing and enhancing systems and processes.

- Employers are receptive to the idea of a ‘one-stop-shop’ that provides a single gateway to a range of training, including specialist provision, and providers.
Key recommendations arising from the research

- Providers need to demonstrate the benefits of training to employers in a language that they understand and which links closely with their business strategy.

- It is important for providers to build long-term relationships with individual businesses in order to develop a detailed understanding of their business strategy and associated training needs.

- Good communication and effective customer relationship management (CRM) systems and processes are critical if long-term relationships with employers are to be maintained.

- Providers should give further consideration to the ways in which their training is delivered. Where possible, providers should offer the option of delivering training on company premises as well as offering training in bite-size chunks. In some instances it may be more appropriate to work with employers to accredit their own internal training programmes.

- Effective marketing strategies are an important means of increasing employers’ knowledge and awareness of what providers can offer as well as addressing any misconceptions employers may have.
1 Introduction

1.1 CFE has produced this report for Linking London Lifelong Learning Network. It builds on previous research conducted by CFE into employer demand for higher level skills. This research focuses in particular on how and why employers choose a training provider and what key challenges this presents for universities and colleges when engaging with employers.

Linking London LLN

1.2 Linking London is one of 30 Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Established in September 2006 and funded until July 2010, Linking London is part of a nationwide strategy to facilitate progression into and through the higher education system. It works to: create new learning opportunities; forge agreements across institutions; and produce publicity to help people understand how they can progress through the system.¹

1.3 Linking London supports a number of institutions in this role. Its member institutions consist of a large and unique partnership of 34 educational establishments including 15 universities, 13 FE colleges and four adult focused institutions based in and around Central, East and North London.

1.4 Linking London is one of five LLNs operating in London. While the network has predominantly focused on the public sector, covering education, health (including sport) and the community and voluntary sectors, from September last year the network expanded its work into the private sectors.

1.5 Their area covers the following twelve boroughs of the Greater London Authority: the City of Westminster, the London Borough of Camden, the London Borough Enfield, the London Borough Hackney, the London Borough Haringey, the London Borough Islington, the London Borough Lambeth, the London Borough Lewisham, the London Borough Newham, the London Borough Southwark, the London Borough Tower Hamlets and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

1.6 Linking London plays an important intermediary role. It works with learners, providers and employers in order to gather relevant information which can be used to enhance and facilitate collaboration as well as improve the ‘learning journey’ for all those involved.

¹ [http://www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk/site/about-lln/]
² Includes two Associate Members that joined the network at the end of 2008
Previous research

1.7 The Leitch Review of Skills published in 2006 recommended that 40 per cent of the population aged 19 to State Pension age should be qualified to Level 4 or above by 2020. As at least 70 per cent of the workforce has already left compulsory education, the review indicated that:

‘Further improvements in the UK’s high skills base must come from workforce development and increased employer engagement’

1.8 It was within this context that CFE embarked on an extensive programme of research to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the demand for higher level skills from employers. In March 2008, CFE published ‘Known Unknowns’, a research report that assessed the extent and nature of demand for higher level skills from businesses in the East Midlands. In June, HEFCE commissioned us to repeat the survey in the West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber regions.

1.9 Between October and November 2008, CFE conducted a similar research project on behalf of Linking London focussing on employers with 50 or more staff, based in Inner London within the public, private and third sectors. A total of 302 employers took part in this quantitative research project which was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).

1.10 The report, ‘The demand for higher level skills in inner London’, concluded that 61 per cent of employers were undertaking higher level skills training, with 96 per cent of the training resulting in a qualification. Investing in higher level skills training was seen as part of their overall business strategy. The reason why the remaining 39 per cent of employers were not investing in higher level skills was either because their staff already possessed the higher level skills and/or qualifications necessary or that training at this level was not required for staff to perform their role effectively.

1.11 The research also set out to determine the market share of the different providers in Linking London’s catchment area. Universities currently dominate the market. Over half of employers (52%) use a university for their higher level skills training, compared with 18 per cent that use a private training provider, and just over one in ten (12%) that use a college.

1.12 The report also indicates that employers may have a pre-conceived view of what different providers can offer their business. While universities dominate

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4 Leitch, World Class Skills, P68
7 13% of employers did not know what type of provider they used.
the market for academic qualifications, they are less successful in the professional and vocational markets. Further evidence of this trend is provided in the follow-up to Known Unknowns, ‘Beyond Known Unknown’s’ which provides a more in-depth analysis of employers’ perceptions and experiences of higher level skills training in the East Midlands.

1.13 The findings have generated some interesting questions about the ways in which employers go about choosing a suitable provider and what systems (if any) they have in place to record and monitor their experience of different providers.

This report

1.14 This research adds further insight and depth to the findings from the original demand study undertaken by CFE on behalf of Linking London. While the initial study focuses on the demand for higher level skills, this report covers training at all levels, exploring further what level of training employers are undertaking and their reasons for this. The purpose of the research is to help facilitate successful employer engagement strategies through exploring:

- how partner institutions can encourage employers in Inner London to undertake training;
- what do institutions need to change in order for employers to use them as their main training provider; and
- employer attitudes and perceptions towards current or future employer engagement strategies.

1.15 The report is structured as follows Chapter 2 provides a policy summary for the period of 2008/09. Chapter 3 outlines the method used to undertake the research. In Chapter 4 we explore the demand for training based on the businesses interviewed. Chapter 5 examines the impact of the recession and Chapter 6 assesses how employers choose a provider. Chapter 7 looks at businesses’ experiences of engaging with universities and colleges and how they would like this relationship to develop in the future. Finally, Chapter 8 outlines the conclusions from our research and the important questions we believe it generates.

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8 James Kewin, Lindsey Bowes & Tristram Hughes, Beyond Known Unknowns: a further exploration of the demand for higher level skills from businesses, CFE (2008). Available to download at www.cfe.org.uk
2 Policy summary 2008/09

2.1 Since ‘The demand for higher level skills in Inner London’ was published, the UK has entered into a recession which has had a devastating impact on businesses in some sectors. Along with banks a number of businesses have fallen, while others have had to make tough decisions in order to survive. In the worst of the recession 50 small businesses were closing each day\(^9\), leading to a significant rise in unemployment.\(^{10}\)

2.2 Despite facing strong difficulties, the evidence suggests that many businesses intend to continue training. According to a recent poll\(^{11}\) undertaken by ICM for CFE in May this year, 73 per cent agreed with the Government statement that: ‘businesses that invest in training are less likely to fail’; the same proportion had undertaken training within the last six months.

2.3 Recent CBI research\(^{12}\) indicates that the recession is likely to be over by the end of this year. However in the recent poll, businesses were more prudent; just 24 per cent agreed with Government estimations, while 50 per cent believed the recession could last for a further two years and 22 per cent forecasted that it may go on for three or more years.\(^{13}\)

2.4 The context of higher education is also changing. Despite burgeoning demand, caps on additional student numbers have been imposed and further funding cuts are likely in the future. However, one area where Government priorities have not changed is in improving employer engagement in higher level skills. The Commons Committee for Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills declared in late 2008: ‘the role of HE within the Leitch agenda, in particular its relationship with employers, appears to us to be a major weakness within the Government’s policy on skills’.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{10}\) Ashley Seager, *Unemployment jumps 220,000 to 2.4m*, The Guardian (12\(^{th}\) August 2009). Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/aug/12/unemployment-jobless-rise


\(^{13}\) Kewin and Sanchez, *The Impact of Recession on Training*

\(^{14}\) Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee, *Re-skilling for recovery: After Leitch, implementing skills and training policies*, first session report, Volume 1, House of
2.5 Before the recession had really taken hold, practical advice for institutions seeking to engage effectively with employers was offered in ‘Stepping Higher’—a report produced by the CBI, Universities UK (UUK), and HEFCE. The Government has also continued to stress to businesses the importance of training while in a recession.

2.6 Against the backdrop of the recession, ‘Standing Together’, published by UUK and HEFCE, provides case studies of how universities can work with businesses, including examples of flexible, bespoke and employer-led provision. Professor Rick Trainor, President of UUK, stated that: “we [universities] want to be responsive to business needs, and for that response to be quick, flexible and of real benefit,” while David Lammy, Minister of State for Higher Education, referred to this document as a, “call to action.”

2.7 More recently, ‘Stronger Together’, published by CBI, provides a new context to the current challenges facing both businesses and universities. The overarching theme is the positive benefit of building strong, workable, long-term relationships between businesses and the HE sector, although it comments that: ‘Universities could improve their capacity to deliver workforce training, including leadership and management courses. Employers must do more to make their needs for this training clear.’ This report was largely welcomed and has stimulated on-going debate leading up to the forthcoming review on student fees.

2.8 The review of students’ fees and the publication of the Higher Education Framework are both likely to have a major impact on the sector. David Lammy, Minister of State for Higher Education, commented that there would be greater links between funding and the economy and that: “any sensible analysis can conclude that universities need to find new ways to leverage more private money into the system.” The Higher Education Framework is due to be published in the autumn, with the review on fees likely to commence around the same time.


18 HEFCE, ibid


2.9 As neither Labour nor the Conservatives have revealed their stance on fees, it seems likely that the outcome of the fees review will not be known until after a general election. The outcome of a change in Government is widely predicted, and the general election is bound to have an impact on practices as well as the external environment in which businesses and higher education institutions seek to build relationships with each other.
3 Method

3.1 Our research is based on 16 consultations with employers who are:

- Mainly based in the private sector;
- Have 50 or more employees; and
- Are located within Linking London’s catchment area (covering 12 London boroughs).

3.2 We spoke to a broad range of employers. Table 1 outlines those employers who took part in the research by: sector, size, location and experience of training. As the research is only based on the views and opinions of 16 employers, it is not representative of employers as a whole but provides a way of obtaining explorative and indicative viewpoints and experiences.

3.3 The sample was initially drawn from those employers that participated in the first Linking London commissioned demand study and agreed to be re-contacted. CFE contacted a total of 43 employers, of these eight took part in the consultation, 22 refused to take part and the remaining 13 were un-contactable. The recession has undoubtedly impacted on employers’ willingness to participate in the research. A significant proportion of employers declined to participate because they were in the process of making redundancies. Other employers did not have the time to take part because they were operating with a reduced number of staff, due to recent redundancies.

3.4 In order to achieve the target number of consultations, CFE contacted a fresh sample of employers purchased from the sample provider ‘UKChanges’\(^\text{21}\). From this sample a total of eight employers agreed to take part in the research.

3.5 The consultations took place by telephone between September and October 2009. Telephone interviews are more cost-effective than face-to-face interviews both in terms of time and resources. Being time efficient is particularly important when interviewing employers who are generally reluctant to give up their work time to take part in research. This was demonstrated through the difficulty we experienced in recruiting employers. Conducting telephone interviews also limits any wasted time and resources through broken appointments, which was a frequent problem throughout the fieldwork.

3.6 However, this method, like any other, has its limitations. Building rapport between the interviewer and the respondent is more challenging and both parties are deprived of visual cues and non verbal communication that are an

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\(^{21}\) http://www.ukchanges.com/
integral element of face-to-face interactions. The medium through which an interview is conducted can therefore influence the nature of the response.

3.7 Interviews were conducted with a representative from the business responsible for making decisions about training and development. The conversations on average lasted 20 minutes and covered the broad themes of:

- training undertaken within the organisation;
- choosing a training provider; and
- engaging with providers

3.8 The topic guide used for the interview can be found in Appendix A.

3.9 When exploring whether employers had undertaken higher level skills training, the definition given to employers in this research was the same as that used in the original demand survey, as outlined below. Like our initial demand survey, it was necessary to prompt employers further on the details of the courses undertaken in order determine whether they had undertaken higher level skills training or not.

Higher Level Skills

Training and development which is all or just elements of a degree, post graduate certificate, diploma, masters or doctorate. Equally, it can be studying for an equivalent level professional or vocational qualification at Level 4 and above, perhaps through an industry or trade body, for example, accountancy or law.

These higher level skills can be acquired through long, short or distance learning without necessarily leading to a qualification and can be offered in part or in full by universities, further education colleges, private providers and in-house training facilities.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer size</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Level of training undertaken in previous 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Lewisham</td>
<td>Up to Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>Motor</td>
<td>Enfield</td>
<td>Up to Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>Ambulance and Medical Transportation Services</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Level 4 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>Electrical Contractors and Electricians</td>
<td>Enfield</td>
<td>Up to Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 employees</td>
<td>Museums &amp; Art Galleries</td>
<td>Lewisham</td>
<td>Up to Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-149 employees</td>
<td>Employment and Recruitment Companies and Consultants</td>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td>Up to Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150-199 employees</td>
<td>Hotels &amp; Catering</td>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>Up to Level 3 ILM endorsed courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-249 employees</td>
<td>Hotels &amp; Catering</td>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>Up to Level 3 ILM endorsed courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-249 employees</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>Internal training not bearing a qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250-499 employees</td>
<td>Maritime Services</td>
<td>Lambeth</td>
<td>Level 4 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500+ employees</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>No training which resulted in a qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500+ employees</td>
<td>Property and Business Services</td>
<td>Lambeth</td>
<td>Up to Level 4 ILM endorsed courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>500+ employees</td>
<td>Property and Business Services</td>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>Level 4 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500+ employees</td>
<td>Fashion Shops</td>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>Up to Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500+ employees</td>
<td>Photocopier Suppliers</td>
<td>Islington</td>
<td>Specialist training not bearing a qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500+ employees</td>
<td>Charitable organisations</td>
<td>City of Westminster</td>
<td>Level 4 and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Breakdown of employers by size, sector, location and level of training undertaken in the past 12 months
4 Demand for training

4.1 In this chapter we explore the reasons why employers engage in training along with the types of training undertaken by the organisations who took part in the consultations.

Reasons for training

4.2 Previous research conducted by CFE for Linking London and other regional associations found that business imperatives are the primary drivers for training. If there is a clear business case for training and the employer perceives that they will achieve a return on their investment, then they are more likely to train.

4.3 The employers that we consulted generally recognised that training is important to the business as well as to individual employees. One employer in the Finance sector commented:

“[Training] is needed to carry the business forward, everyone is more aware of qualifications these days. I do believe in our industry certain jobs have to be carried out by a certain level of person” [Finance, 200-249 employees].

4.4 However, for some employers, training is a lower priority: “Training is not a priority of the organisation, the focus is on marketing and product development”. This employer from the Fashion industry suggested that this is at least in part a reaction to the recession. The impact of the recession on training is covered in further detail in Chapter 5.

4.5 Regardless of the business stance on training, the majority of employers we spoke to felt that some training is essential, in particular, induction training for new employees. This training not only introduces new members of staff to the company and its processes and procedures, it also allows them to acquire relevant job-specific skills.

4.6 The type of induction training given to new employees can vary considerably, depending on the size of the company and job roles. In one company which employs Chartered Surveyors, graduates are recruited and put on a two year training contract with the company. In this time, they have general induction training as well as technical training, training in business skills and opportunities for personal development, all of which lead to a final assessment by The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the opportunity to achieve Chartered status.

4.7 Training is not only undertaken to receive accreditation from a professional body but also to maintain a professional qualification. In the same company outlined above, after the two year training programme has finished, employees are required to dedicate around 20 hours a year to maintain their Chartered
status through self-learning as well as attending in-house lectures, with external speakers, arranged by their employer.

4.8 Employers in some instances recognise the importance of continual training, not purely as a means to maintain professional qualifications but for the root purpose of keeping up-to-date with the latest developments in their sector; as highlighted by one employer in the field of Social Work:

“there has been a range of technical training to ensure they [social workers] stay ahead of the field....to model best practise really” [Charitable Organisation, 500+ employees].

4.9 In addition, there are internal drivers that help to determine the extent, level, and type of training undertaken by employers, including individual need. In most cases, employees are encouraged to discuss their training requirements with their line manager informally and/or during their annual appraisal. Although the final decision rests with the employer, and will often be taken in the context of the wider needs of the business, it is clear that individual employees can influence the process.

Level of training

4.10 While our recent survey indicates that around half of businesses in the private sector (with 50 or more employees and based in Inner London) had undertaken higher level skills training, only five of the employers who took part in this consultation had undertaken any higher level skills training in the last 12 months. Employers gave a number of reasons for this.

4.11 Some employers have a policy to recruit rather than up-skill their existing workforce and have no need to train at higher level because staff are: “normally degree qualified when they come in”. One employer in the Property and Businesses Services sector highlighted that they specifically employed staff at graduate level or above: “they are already trained when they come in”.

4.12 For other employers the lack of a perceived need to train at higher levels is derived from industry regulators that only require companies to ensure staff are trained to Level 3. Regulation of this nature can also serve to limit demand for higher level training from individual employees. Individuals are unlikely to be motivated to train at higher levels if they perceive that the qualification will not be recognised or valued by their employer and the wider sector: “There is currently no need or request from employees for higher skill training”.

4.13 For some employers it is not necessarily the ‘level’ of training per se which is key but the skills and competencies obtained from the training as highlighted by one employer:

“It [higher level skills] is an ill-defined concept…in different settings higher level skills are completely different things. Other companies, big corporate companies, what they are about is trying to hire the managers of the future; what we are about is trying to secure the technical know-how and skills base with good engineering ability and
competence…which is a completely different agenda’ [Manufacturing, 500+ employees].

4.14 Although some organisations do not currently undertake higher level skills training this does not preclude them for doing so in the future. Current qualification levels are often a factor. Many employers report that existing staff need to be up-skilled to Level 3 before they are able and eligible to progress into higher level learning. For example, in one hotel, the focus was on training employees up to Level 3 with an overall strategy to progress onto higher level skills training in the future.

4.15 For other businesses, there is an imperative to strike a balance between the need for higher level skills training and the cost: “It is useful to have a qualification, but there are additional costs.” One employer in the photocopying industry highlighted that the funding of higher level skills training can be a problem because it is unsupported by the Government.

4.16 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at Level 2 and 3 are the most common type of accredited training programme offered by the employers who took part in the consultation. However, the majority of this training activity is being funded through the Government’s Train to Gain scheme.

4.17 The evidence suggests, therefore, that the availability of public funding can act as a barrier to training at all levels for employers. Given the recent reduction in funding for Train to Gain23, this could have serious implications for the take-up of training opportunities at the lower levels which could then impact on employers advancing onto higher level skills training.

Delivery of training

4.18 The mode of delivery varies according to the type of training being conducted. Typically, staff inductions and some job-specific training are delivered in-house and on-the-job. Only one of the companies consulted had a dedicated in-house training team. Employers tended to use external providers and/or associates to deliver on (and off-)the-job training to staff on the company premises.

“We do use external providers for some in house training, but it is very rare. In training and consultancy we use associates as is it a very specialised field of work and you have to have been a social worker and you need to have done child protection” [Charitable Organisation, 500+ employees].

4.19 A key benefit of this approach for employers is that the external provider tailors the training to the needs of the business area, and in that respect, is more specialised.

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4.20 It is less common for employers to release staff to attend external training programmes: “People do go on external courses...I wouldn’t know all of those courses, it ranges from technical courses to people based courses on communication” [Charitable Organisation, 500+ employees].

Summary

4.21 Employers undertake training as part of their overall business strategy with the level of training they undertake being dictated by the needs of the business. If there is no apparent need to train employees in higher level skills, then employers will not do so.

4.22 The delivery of the training is determined to a certain extent by the type of training provided. However the majority of training tends to be undertaken on the business premises, either internally or by an external provider.

4.23 The key messages for providers, and those seeking to break into new markets and/or industry sectors in particular, are clear:

- Demonstrate the benefits of training in a language recognised by employers, linking where possible to their overall business strategy.

- Give serious consideration into how training is delivered, particularly at lower levels, and explore the possibility of delivering on the company premises if they do not already do so.
5 Impact of the recession

5.1 This chapter looks at how our respondents feel training and development within their organisation has changed as a result of the recession.

5.2 There is a commonly held view that levels of training tend to drop during a recession. In order to test this theory further, CFE commissioned ICM to conduct an online poll of businesses to assess the impact of the recession on staff training. The poll was conducted in May 2009 with over 500 employers. Our results show that just 16 per cent of businesses indicated that they planned to reduce levels of staff training and development during the recession. When asked why, the most frequently cited responses were:

- a reduced training budget (33%);
- an overall business requirement to save money or reduce costs (26%); and
- a decrease in business turnover (12%).\(^\text{24}\)

5.3 These findings are echoed in our conversations with employers. Very few employers felt that it would be necessary to reduce training as a result of the recession. One reason for this is that there is an element of training which is mandatory and has to be conducted, either as an induction for new employees to the organisation or as a means to keep up with current developments, as one employer in the motor industry comments: “Training has not changed, if we are training our manufacturers we are keeping up to date with current practises and technology.”

5.4 However, indirectly the recession seems to have had some form of impact. While the level of training may be being maintained, some companies are changing the way they deliver training:

“Training has changed as a result of the recession. We provide other courses in leadership and management and now we are doing more training internally than externally.” [Property and Business Services; 500+ employees]

“We used to offer a wider variety of courses. We have cut right back on our external training i.e. people going outside the organisation. Anything that costs more than a certain amount needs to be verified.” [Charitable Organisation, 500+ employees]

5.5 Several businesses are concerned about the long lasting effects of the recession. One employer in the construction industry had particular worries if there was a prolonged shortage of work: “It is very hard to afford the courses as there may not

be work for them in three months time, therefore you loose the grant money and loose the employee. It is not cost effective and it is too expensive”.

5.6 One employer had concerns that while training was not currently affected by the recession, it may have an impact in the future as their company was increasingly focussing on becoming cost effective due to a predicted six per cent cut in the top line budget: “it would be sensible to think that the training budget will also be cut”.

5.7 Two companies did reveal that their training budget had been frozen as a result of the recession. However both could see that this would have a negative effect on the business in the long term as one employer from an accounting firm reveals: “[the recession] slows people down in where we would expect them to be at a given point in time. It is bound to affect their development…and they can’t work efficiently”.

5.8 In a more positive light, one employer stressed that the recession could actually enhance training as employees had more time and capacity to dedicate to training: “now is the time to train staff for when it get busy again”. However not all companies can afford to spend this time training, a lot depends on their size, type of industry and what impact the recession is having on their wider business operations. For some it may not even be their business per se which is affected, but there is still an indirect impact on their budgets: “Indirectly yes [their training is affected by the recession], the company that owns us is having recession problems in Japan and they are unable to capitalise everything” [Fashion, 500+ employees].

5.9 Not all employers feel that the changes to training that have occurred as a result of the recession are a bad thing, in fact one employer felt that the recession had made them appreciate training more:

“I hate to say this but there are some good things which have come out of the recession, in that we need more control over what training we are doing. Training is not just a perk, but what is needed by the organisation” [Charitable Organisation, 500+ employees].

Summary

5.10 In general, employers are not necessarily reducing training as a result of the recession, because there is still a need to train. Instead, employers are looking for ‘value for money’ and to get this they are choosing alternative delivery methods, such as delivering training using their own in-house resources. This is something which may become increasingly important in the long-term as budgets are squeezed and the impact of the recession is reflected in future business strategy.

5.11 In light of the recession, key considerations for providers, and those seeking to break into new markets and/or industry sectors are:
- Working in partnership with employers on the design, delivery and accreditation of their own internal training programmes.

- Offering more ‘bite-size’ training which employers can offer in the short-term, and can continue to build on so long as their training budgets are maintained.
6 Choosing a provider

6.1 This chapter explores the process which organisations go through in order to choose a suitable training provider and looks in particular at the factors which influence their decisions.

Availability

6.2 For employers operating in niche industries, one of the overriding factors that shapes their decision about which training provider to use is the availability of a provider in their local area that specialises in their particular field:

“We are in a very niche market, so there are generally one or two providers. The choice is location and date rather than cost and quality” [Manufacturing, 500+ employees].

6.3 For others, individual employers’ discretion over the choice of training provider is constrained by procurement procedures and/or regulations imposed by external bodies such as industry regulators. In both cases, one or more preferred suppliers are identified and employers are required to obtain their training from these suppliers for an agreed period of time:

“For accountancy training, the provider is chosen as a result of tendering. This process happens once every three years. For some soft skills training, we have an agreement with a training organisation which provides resources for a group of accountancy organisations of a similar size” [Finance, 200-249 employees].

“The construction industry has its own providers for scaffolding. It is good to have a small amount of providers but there is only one qualification body...We go directly to the main body for the training although some employers train themselves through private bodies” [Construction, 50-99 employees].

Prior experience

6.4 Where employers are free to exercise choice over the training providers they use, a number of factors impact on the decision-making process. However, the evidence suggests that prior experience is a crucial factor that influences employers’ behaviour: “I do know which providers I have been using and normally I go back to these providers”.

6.5 Employers are highly likely to continue to use providers that they: “know and trust” to deliver a consistently good quality service, even if they are based overseas - we consulted with one employer whose preference was to use an Australian provider and, as a result, was prepared to time the delivery of staff training to coincide with their visits to the UK.

6.6 These findings resonate with the views expressed by the East Midlands employers consulted for ‘Beyond Known Unknowns’. Employers reported that a
The key advantage of developing a long-term relationship with a provider was that over time the provider developed a deep understanding of the business, its strategic and operational objectives and the training and development needs of its staff. As a result, providers were better able to tailor their programmes to the needs of the business and of individual staff.

6.7 The ability to tailor training to the needs of the organisation is also regarded as an important factor by the employers that participated in the consultation for Linking London. The evidence suggests that employers perceive that smaller providers are better placed to tailor their programmes than larger providers offering a broader range of provision:

“We use people who are specialist in a specific area e.g. presentation skills.....We tend not to use the big companies that do everything as they are trying to do too much and are too general. We want something which is tailored for the individual and our particular business” [Property and Business Services; 500 + employees].

Cost versus quality

6.8 Previous research conducted by CFE into employer demand for higher level skills training concluded that while both direct and indirect costs of training were undoubtedly factors for some companies that had not previously invested in training at higher levels, the majority were prepared to invest in training that met individual needs and wider organisational objectives. Employers were not necessarily attracted by free or low cost provision and were more concerned about value for money linked to the quality of provision.

6.9 Once again, these earlier findings resonate with the views expressed by employers consulted on behalf of Linking London. When probed specifically about the role of cost in the decision making process, many employers reported that it was important but: “you get what you pay for”. Quality is, therefore, the overriding factor. Employers perceive that quality should not be compromised in order to drive down the cost: “Quality is the main factor and the cheaper training is unlikely to offer that”.

6.10 Although employers are willing to pay for good quality training, in the current climate, they are increasingly concerned about value for money:

“At the moment cost influences it [their decision] more than it would normally but value for money is probably more important. Depending on the quality of the training I would still be prepared to pay a bit more” [Property and Business Services; 500 + employees].

6.11 The only instance where cost is not an issue is when the training is fully-funded through government schemes such as Train to Gain. One employer commented: “When it was government funded, cost wasn’t an issue”. However, these initiatives tend to be focused on lower level provision and the lack of funding available for training at higher levels is a barrier for some employers as one respondent highlights:“Funding can cause problems for higher level skills...it is unsupported by the government”.
Quality marks

6.12 Quality is important to employers. However, there is considerable variation in the way in which employers judge quality and, in particular, the extent to which quality marks such as Investors in People (IiP) influence their decisions about which providers to use.

6.13 Some of the employers consulted were fully aware of what quality marks such as IiP represent and, in some instances, were working towards accreditation themselves: “Quality marks are important – we are going for Investors in People ourselves”.

6.14 Conversely, other employers had limited awareness of quality marks and preferred to base their assessment of the quality of providers on their own experience or the experience of others:

“Having a formal quality mark wouldn’t necessarily effect my decision– no. I tend to want to know the provider well before I use them, either through my own experience or the experience of people I trust. I wouldn’t tend to do a general trawl to find a provider”. [Property and Business Services, 500 + employees]

6.15 For others, the awarding body is regarded as a sign of quality. Programmes accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management or City and Guilds for example are often perceived to be of high quality: “I do not really look for quality marks, if they are offering a course at City and Guilds level then we would expect they could offer the course competently”.

6.16 Finally, in some sectors, the recognition of an industry body and/or a favourable inspection by a monitoring body such as Ofsted, was regarded as a further indicator of quality: “There would have to be some form of governing body. They can’t be a teacher off the street. They must be qualified for the construction industry”.

The role of the employee

6.17 We discussed previously that employees can influence the type of training delivered by their employer; they can also have an impact on the choice of provider. The findings suggest that employers are less likely to re-use a provider if they receive negative feedback from trainees:

“Employees do not choose but can provide feedback in terms of quality” [Property and Business Services, 500 + employees].

“Employees have an indirect impact through training - if it’s negative we will look to make changes” [Hotels and catering, 150-199 employees].

“Employees provide feedback and the provider can be changed” [Finance, 200-249 employees].

6.18 It is not uncommon for employees to source and fund their own training; we identified two examples of this in the construction and manufacturing industries. Providers should not, therefore, under-estimate the importance of
marketing their programmes to, and meeting the needs of, individuals as well as employers.

**Management information**

6.19 Once an employer has identified a provider that they believe offers good quality, cost effective provision, do they have a system in place to capture information on that provider?

6.20 The findings suggest that most have a system in place to record individual training activities. This system is often maintained by the human resources department in companies that have their own internal HR function. However, in some businesses, it is also the responsibility of the employee to keep their own records up-to-date:

“With recording, the company keeps copies of all paperwork as company policy. There is also a computer system where it is the responsibility of the employee to update” [Manufacturing, 500+ Employees].

6.21 However, not all employers systematically record information about the providers they use. This information is typically retained in the memory of the person responsible for organising the training:

“I don’t keep formal records, I just know who to go to” [Property and Business Services, 500 + employees].

“I do not record anything but I do know which providers we have been using and I normally go back to these providers” [Motor Industry; 50-99 employees].

**Summary**

6.22 Overall, a combination of factors can influence an employer’s choice of provider. However, the decision is ultimately dependent on the needs of the business as well as the individual employee. The key messages for providers, and those seeking to break into new markets and/or industry sectors in particular, are clear:

- Be realistic about what you can and cannot deliver and play to your strengths.

- Deliver on your promises.

- Invest time in both developing and maintaining effective relationships with your customers.

- Most employers are willing to pay for good quality training that meets individual and wider company objectives – do not compromise on quality in order to reduce the cost to the employer.
- Quality marks alone are not sufficient to set providers apart from the competition; providers are judged on the basis of performance and word of mouth is a powerful tool.

- Do not underestimate the role and influence of employees; meeting their needs as well as the needs of the employer is key.
7 Engaging with colleges and universities

7.1 This chapter looks at employers’ knowledge and awareness of the services offered by colleges and universities in their area. In particular, it focuses on the nature of the engagement businesses currently have with providers and how relationships could be developed in the future.

Current perceptions of colleges and universities

7.2 Previous research by CFE\(^{25}\) concluded that the majority of businesses do not view public and private sector training providers as competitors in the same market. Universities are commonly perceived as providers of ‘traditional’ academic qualifications and many businesses are unaware that some can offer the sort of bespoke provision typically delivered by private training providers. Private training providers, on the other hand, are widely regarded as flexible and responsive and, as a result, able to tailor provision specifically to the needs of businesses.

7.3 Once again, these earlier findings resonate with the perceptions and experiences of the employers consulted on behalf of Linking London. Many assumed that colleges and universities would not offer the kind of bespoke training they required and, as a result, limited their search to private training providers. This comment from an employer in the finance industry was typical of a number of the employers consulted: “it wouldn’t even occur to me to look at colleges and universities...when I type training into Google, I tend to get details of private providers”.

Academic focus

7.4 The findings suggest that this is at least in part a consequence of a commonly held perception that university provision in particular, has a strong academic focus and, as a result, is out of touch with the needs of industry and vocationally-trained employees. One employer in the construction sector reported: “the scaffolding industry goes back donkey’s years – scaffolders don’t like that sort of work and they don’t like the theory and that’s where they [universities] fail”. Another stressed: “being business focussed is the other issue for universities. The academics are very interested in their own theories and are not always interested in the real world”.

Flexibility

7.5 A perceived lack of flexibility could be a further reason why some employers do not seek to engage with universities in particular. One employer who had used

\(^{25}\) James Kewin, Lindsey Bowes and Tristram Hughes (2009) Beyond known unknowns: A further exploration of the demand for higher level skills from businesses.
two of Linking London’s partner colleges for training commented: “The colleges are very flexible...For example with our night staff the college would come early mornings so not to disrupt their routines”. This is in contrast to another employer who had used a university outside of London and commented: “[university] has not been the easiest partner and there have been complaints about the inflexibility of the teaching styles”.

7.6 The key message here is that employers want flexibility, not only in terms of programme content, but also when and how programmes are delivered.

**Employer Engagement Strategies**

*Challenge perceptions and raise awareness*

7.7 Employers’ awareness and understanding of the provision currently offered by universities and colleges is, therefore, shaped by commonly held (mis)conceptions about the nature of the provision. If universities, and to a lesser extent colleges, are to compete for a greater share of the vocational market, more needs to be done to challenge these perceptions and to raise awareness of both the range of training available and the different modes of delivery.

7.8 Although at least one employer expressed a preference for proactively seeking out a suitable college or university, most felt that the onus should be on the provider to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the needs of local businesses and to market themselves more effectively:

“They [colleges and universities] need to match the other outlets by marketing themselves and looking at the local business within their area and to come out and speak to local businesses more”[Motor industry, 50-99 employees].

“at this stage is would nice to be approached as I don’t know how that relationship would look” [Manufacturing, 500+ employees].

7.9 This is particularly true of smaller businesses, many of whom had very little awareness of what colleges and universities currently offer: “in terms of our business I am unsure what universities and colleges could offer us”.

7.10 There is evidence to suggest that improved marketing and a more proactive approach does result in additional take-up from employers. For example, one employer reported that as a result of an email she had recently received from a local college, a face-to-face meeting had taken place to discuss their training requirements. Prior to receiving this e-mail, the employer admitted that it would not have occurred to her to contact this particular college for training.

7.11 There is also evidence to suggest that improvements in marketing materials such as prospectuses are also beginning to increase employers’ knowledge and awareness of the products and services on offer and address some of the misconceptions employers have of public sector providers:
“Looking at prospectuses recently and they [colleges and universities] have improved a lot. I see a lot more courses that are far more vocational. So there has been engagement with the workplace and the reality of what work life is for a lot of universities, but I don’t know if that is true across board...but maybe that is ok.” [Finance, 200-249 employees].

**Develop and maintain effective relationships**

7.12 We noted in the previous chapter that prior experience is a powerful influence over an employer’s choice of training provider. Once demand for provision has been stimulated through improved marketing and awareness raising activities, it is, therefore, crucial for providers to establish and maintain their relationships with the employers. As one interview put it: “I worked with [London-based college] when I was with a different company and they were excellent, but I would put it more down to people's personalities”.

7.13 Employers report that rapid and sustained communication is key to the development of effective partnerships between businesses and training providers; poor communication can have a negative impact on employers and providers as the following comments illustrate:

“communication was a problem – when they were courting me the relationship was very good, but when they had my heart they didn’t want to know… [the relationship] broke down and I could not get them to talk to me .......there were often course closures and we were not informed”. [Fashion industry, 500 plus employees]

“Holidays are a problem because they are lengthy and when we have tried resolving some situations in the past, the academics have been on holiday”. [Fashion Shops, 500+ employees].

“[London-based college] have been very good for the training, but sometimes they are a little slow in getting back to you”. [Hotels and catering, 150-199 employees].

7.14 Many universities and some colleges have dedicated employer engagement units which typically sit outside of the formal academic structure. It is common for Business Development Managers located within these units to initiate contact with employers and assess their training and development needs. They then refer employers to specific departments which develop and deliver an appropriate training solution. It is, therefore, critical that effective systems are in place to ensure a seamless transition between the different departments within the providing institution and that a consistent level of service is maintained throughout the year - not just during term-time.

**Review and enhance systems and processes**

7.15 In addition to the development and implementation of an effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, it is also important to examine how wider systems and processes could be further streamlined. The evidence suggests that other systems, such as student enrolment, can also impact on the
extent to which a provider is able to engage effectively with employers as the following respondent demonstrates:

“it would be nice to have a joined up enrolment system, so if you were on the college database it would be easier process than having to start every time from scratch, which is what you have to do, even though you have used the college before and the person has been before” [Electrical contractors, 50-99 employees].

7.16 Notwithstanding issues of client confidentiality, some employers would also welcome more effective systems for ensuring they receive regular feedback on how their employees are doing on the training they are undertaking; one employer in the fashion industry felt that the system is currently a bit “haphazard”.

One-stop shop

7.17 In order to explore how colleges and universities could engage more effectively with businesses in the future, employers were asked specifically if a one-stop shop, where businesses could go to for all their training needs, would be beneficial.

7.18 Within these broad parameters, the definition of a ‘one-stop shop’ was left to the employers’ interpretation in order to allow them to build their own picture of how it could work.

7.19 Some employers conceptualised a ‘one-stop shop’ as a single provider offering training at all levels ranging from entry level to Level 8. However, opinions on the benefits of this model were divided. Some were in support of this approach: “That would be lovely” and “definitely an advantage because it makes my job easier as I am not qualified on what sort of trainers you should use”, while others were strongly against it: “I think that would be the worst case scenario ever...[the provider] would be a jack of all trades but a master of none”. Those that were against the concept of a one-stop shop felt that quality would be compromised and specialist areas of provision would be reduced.

7.20 Others perceived a ‘one-stop-shop’ as tool or gateway akin to a comparison website that would enable employers to search and compare all the training available on a particular topic: “a bit like price-finder would be great” and, “a picture in my head there is a website that would come up with providers in the area”. Some also felt that the opportunity to rate the quality of the service provided would be a beneficial feature. A number of regions have developed web-based progression pathway tools that have specific sections for employers. However, it should be noted that they have stopped short of providing measures of quality in the interests of remaining independent and impartial.

7.21 On balance and regardless of how employers imagine a ‘one-stop-shop’ would work in practice, the idea of going to one place for information and support with training is broadly appealing to the majority. The key challenge for
networks such as Linking London is developing a system that is accurate and can be kept up to date. Achieving the buy-in of all providers is essential along with the adoption of data sharing protocols such as XCRI and systems to ensure the seamless transition of learners as they progress from one institution / level to another.27

Summary

The process of engaging with employers is summarised in diagram 1. Overall, the key barriers for colleges and universities when engaging with employers are:

- Employers’ limited awareness and knowledge of the training provision offered by colleges and universities that meets the requirements of business.

- Misconceptions about the university offer - employers assume that universities focus on ‘academic’ rather than ‘vocational’ aspects of training.

The key messages for providers, and those seeking to break into new markets and/or industry sectors in particular, are:

- Effective marketing strategies can increase knowledge and awareness and help to address employers’ misconceptions about the current offer.

- Employers’ want one place to go to where they can obtain information and support with their training needs.

- It is critical for providers to achieve and maintain good relationships with employers.

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27 See http://www.xcri.org/
8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Variety is the overriding theme to emerge from our research – there is considerable diversity in the training employers do, the approach they take to choosing a provider, and the relationship they would like to have with providers in the future. As a result, there is no magic solution or ‘one size fits all’ approach to effective employer engagement.

8.2 So how can partner institutions encourage employers to undertake training in the first instance, and in particular, at higher levels? A key factor in any decision to train is the overall business strategy. Employers will only invest in training when there is a clear business need for doing so. Providers seeking to market their provision to employers need to be able to clearly articulate how staff training will benefit the business and, perhaps more importantly, how it will help them to address presenting problems or issues. In order to do this effectively, providers need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the challenges local businesses are facing and the impact this is having on their strategic and operational objectives. However, each business will have different priorities which will need to be taken into account.

8.3 Once employers have identified a need to train, the next step is to choose a provider. We have identified that a range of factors influence the decision-making process, including availability of suitable provision, cost and quality. While cost is becoming increasingly important, particularly in the context of the recession and reduced public funding, quality and value for money appear to be the over-riding factors. It is, therefore, critical for providers play to their strengths and ensure quality is not compromised in order to deliver training at a reduced cost.

8.4 In uncertain times, and with reduced training budgets, employers are also likely to become increasingly reluctant to commit to full programmes. Providers should, therefore, explore the possibility of delivering programmes in bite-sized modules which allow employers to spread the cost over a longer period of time and suspend activity in particularly difficult times.

8.5 In order to make effective training choices, employers need to be aware of the full range of provision available to them. It appears that a significant proportion of employers are overlooking colleges and universities because of a lack of awareness of the training they offer and/or commonly held beliefs about the type of training they deliver. Effective marketing strategies are the first step to providing employers with key programme information and challenging prevailing misconceptions about universities in particular.

8.6 Employers believe that a one-stop shop for training information, support and advice would be highly beneficial. This is an important consideration for Linking London and its network of providers. Would it be feasible to provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ in the form of a website, containing information on the
training provided by all of the partner institutions? How would this website be maintained? And would it be feasible to provide employers with information on the cost and quality of training in an independent and impartial way?

8.7 Providing employers with the relevant information is just the first stage. Once employers are engaged, it is important for providers to build up and maintain the relationship, underpinned by effective systems and processes. By working in partnership, providers will develop a greater understanding of the needs of business and employers will have the opportunity to experience first hand how providers operate.

8.8 Finally, it is critical for providers to ensure that the employers they engage with have a positive experience. When an employer is pleased with a provider, it is highly likely that they will use them again, whether in their current role or a future workplace. One positive experience could lead to years of repeat business. So while engaging with employers in the first instance can take time and is challenging, it can be fruitful in the long-term.
Bibliography


Appendix A: Topic Guide

Introductions

Introduce self

Introduce CFE:

CFE is an independent not for profit company based in Leicester and London. We undertake research in the fields of employment and skills, working with a number of Government departments and learning providers.

Introduce client

We are currently working on behalf of Linking London Lifelong Network (LLN) which is a network of universities and colleges based in and around inner London.

Introduce research

The purpose of our research is to explore employer demand for high level skills and how universities and colleges can meet the needs of employers in terms of their training and development requirements.

You may remember taking part in a short survey in November last year about your training requirements. If possible, we would like to ask you a few follow-up questions? This should only take around 20 minutes of your time.

Ask permission to record interview. This is for internal purposes only to ensure we detail our conversation as accurately as possible.

Re-assure respondent of confidentiality and anonymity.
Definition of higher level skills training

We would like to explore your views and experiences around higher level skills training...

By higher level skills I mean …

Training and development which is all or just elements of a degree, post graduate certificate, foundation degree, diploma, masters or doctorate. Equally it can be studying for an equivalent level professional or vocational qualification at Level 4 and above, perhaps through an industry or trade body, for example, accountancy or law.

These higher level skills can be acquired through long, short or distance learning without necessarily leading to a qualification and can be offered in part or in full by universities, further education colleges, private providers and in-house training facilities.

Type of training

9 Have you or your employees undertaken any work related higher level skills training in the last 12 months?

If undertaken higher level skills training

- Discuss types of training undertaken e.g. subject area, qualifications, how administered, etc.

- Discuss reasons for training.

- What evidence do they have of the impact (positive or negative) of training on business?

If not undertaken higher level skills training

- Discuss what type of training has been undertaken (if any).

- Discuss reasons for not undertaking higher level training/barriers to higher level training.

Ask all

10 Has training within the organisation changed as a result of the recession?

- Probe further around changes in amount/frequency of training, type of training, level of training and access to training.

- Discuss reasons for this and impacts in the long term.
Choosing a provider

11 How does the organisation choose suitable training providers?
   - Prompts: internet searches, word of mouth, reputation, existing relationship, preferred supplier, skills broker etc.

12 What factors influence choice?
   - Level/type of training e.g. difference in choice when it is higher level skills training.
   - Cost / value for money - explore awareness, knowledge and use of external funding sources.
   - Location, type of provider, type of qualifications, format of course e.g. e-learning, length of programme, start date?
   - Course content, extent to which it can be tailored to employers’ needs
   - What influence/impact, if any, do quality marks (such as the TQS, IiP) have on decision?

13 Do employees have an impact on training provider used?
   - If yes;
     - How do employees gain information regarding training & providers?
     - How are employees’ training needs identified and assessed?
     - Explore the use of formal and informal approaches.
     - What factors are important for employees when choosing a provider?

14 How does the organisation record providers used and the service received?

15 How could employers be better supported in choosing a suitable provider?
   - Do they tend to use the same providers?
   - Would they like a ‘one-stop-shop’ for all training requirements?

16 Have you used any of the training providers in Linking London’s network [refer to pro-forma with details of providers]?
   - Reason for choosing them?
   - Opinion of service and facilities.

17 Have you used any other providers for higher level skills training?
Name the most recent provider used?

Reason for choosing them?

Opinion of service and facilities.

Engaging with providers

18 Do you think colleges and universities have become more or less focussed on the needs of businesses?
   - Explore reasons for response

19 How can colleges and universities work more closely with businesses?
   - Probe further around use of facilities, type of training, cost, flexibility.
   - What contact/relationship would they like to have?

20 Do you currently have any contact with colleges and universities in your area?
   - Which ones?
   - What is the relationship?
   - What are the benefits for the business/the training provider?
   - Could the relationship be improved, how?

21 How can colleges and universities improve their training offer/package to businesses?
   - Would a ‘one-stop shop’ approach offering all training level from entry – level 8 be beneficial? Why?[only cover if not covered in Q5]
   - Do you require or use other services from colleges and universities? If so, what?

Close and thanks. Ask the informant if they are OK for you to follow up by telephone or e-mail if there is anything further you need. If you run near the end of the time, allow the informant to decide if it is possible to continue, or else to arrange a follow-up.