

Inside

Skills and Employer Responsiveness Programme

North East, North West, Yorkshire and
the Humber and South East Regions



*The winning team of apprentices from the Apprenticeship Challenge Day event
in the North West region.*

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Welcome to the second issue of the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) Programme newsletter for the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and South East regions.

The SER programme aims to work with providers to improve their responsiveness to employers, Apprenticeship provision and programmes to get people into work.

In this edition you'll find articles from providers on the progress and benefits of this "incredibly valuable" SER programme. There are also details of the Low Carbon projects in the North East and North West as well as upcoming events information and useful regional and national contacts and links.

We are also seeking your feedback on these newsletters (see below).

SER programme after March 2011

Between April and July the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme will continue in each of the four regions, the North West, North East, Yorkshire and the Humber and the South East. Whilst much of the activity delivered through the programme will remain the same it will be on a much reduced scale.

To keep up to date with developments please use the programme website

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/ser

Feedback required please

We would like to obtain your feedback on the newsletters of the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme. We would like to know if they are useful for you and whether the articles are relevant and helpful in your work.

Please [click the survey link](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KLFFZJP) (or type the URL <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KLFFZJP> in your browser). The survey will only take a few minutes and your feedback will be much appreciated.

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National Support



Specialist input from the National Apprenticeship Service enhances master classes

The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has been working to support the LSIS Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme through a series of master classes focusing on Apprenticeships and effective employer engagement strategies.

NAS colleagues have shared their experience and expertise of Apprenticeships on subjects including the employer engagement process, effective sales techniques, moving into higher levels and sector growth for Apprenticeships. Contributions from NAS have complemented input from providers on the SER programme at these events.

Sue Price, Director for the National Apprenticeship Service in the North West, believes that employers still have a narrow perception of what Apprenticeships offer, "Typically employers will say that Apprenticeships are mainly for 16 year olds who want a career in hairdressing or construction."

Increasingly there are more opportunities for adults. The coalition government recently announced an extra £250 millions nationally, primarily for adults over 19, creating a minimum of 75,000 extra opportunities. There are 200 different Apprenticeship programmes available in 80 different sectors and around 240,000 apprentices in England. The frameworks are set by industry and regularly updated.

"Apprenticeships deliver extra skills and productivity and are a cornerstone of government strategy. It doesn't matter if you have been in a

job for a long time, or moving job or even industry, there are opportunities for everybody."

Sue Price sees this as a new message for employers, whether they are recruiting or retraining existing staff, to improve productivity and develop individual potential.

Apprentices are loyal and hardworking and help businesses grow - 88% of employers who employ apprentices believe that Apprenticeships lead to a more motivated and satisfied workforce. 83% of employers who employ apprentices rely on their Apprenticeships programme to provide the skilled workers that they need for the future.

The NAS role

NAS engages with a wide range of partners to help design the frameworks for apprentices and implements all government policies aimed at improving the quality and quantity of Apprenticeships.

The National Apprenticeship Service helps to fund the training and provides support at all stages. It also manages a free local, regional and national advertising and recruitment website for employers wanting to recruit apprentices.

National Apprenticeship Week 2011

NAS ran the fourth annual Apprenticeship Week in February (7th to 11th), which was an outstanding success. In the North West there were over 100 events across the region managed by a variety of employers, education providers and other stakeholders all raising the profile of Apprenticeships.

The week received masses of media attention and evaluations are currently being finalised but it looks to be the best week on record!

Employer Responsiveness

St Antony's Centre

Developing programmes and services to better meet the needs of employers

St. Antony's Centre in Manchester is a voluntary sector training provider with thirty years' experience of delivering adult and community and work-based learning programmes. The centre delivers training and qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

St Antony's Centre has grown in capacity in recent years. Participating in the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) Programme is enabling the organisation to improve the ways in which it engages and works with employers in the design and delivery of learning in the workplace. Participating in the SER programme is also giving the organisation support in adjusting to changes in the funding environment and adapting its structures and processes to provide employers with learning services on a commercial basis.

The organisation is committed to gaining maximum benefit from the SER programme and, as well as all the team being involved in the programme, a senior manager has taken the lead on participating in the programme.

The peer exchange groups have provided us with the opportunity to hear and adopt examples of good practice from different providers

The organisation's contracts manager attended the launch event for the SER Programme and has also attended two Peer Exchange Groups. The centre's peer adviser has supported the production of an action plan to improve the centre's marketing of its services and engagement with employers linked to gaining the Training Quality Standard. The peer adviser has also held two one-to-one sessions with the contracts manager.

The full centre team benefited from an Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) workshop in early January. The ONA workshop was well received by centre staff and has been the trigger for the development of an employer engagement strategy and the introduction of a system to map the employer journey in a similar fashion to that already provided for learners.

Participation in the programme has been very beneficial for the St Antony's Centre. Paul Callaghan, contracts manager, reports,

"The Peer Exchange Groups have provided us with the opportunity to hear and adopt examples of good practice from different providers as well as useful information directly from the Skills Funding Agency and Jobcentre Plus."

The support of the peer adviser has been particularly helpful in providing a focus on key areas of improvement for the organisation and identifying steps to bring this about. Senior management and delivery staff are now thinking about how the centre adapts to become even more effective at working with employers and developing new courses and services to meet the needs of both employers and their staff.

Independent Training Services Limited (ITS)

Training organisation learns from outstanding providers

Independent Training Services Limited (ITS) was founded in 1981 as part of the Council for Voluntary Services' (CVS) Employment Initiative. The organisation expanded and in 1987 a separate Limited Company - Barnsley Youth Development Association (BYDA) was established and in 1988 achieved Charitable Status. In 2002 the name was changed to Independent Training Services Limited (ITS). The name change reflected a shift in business position which now incorporates the provision of learning and development to customers of all ages and extends across the whole of South Yorkshire.

ITS employs 61 staff and has contracts to deliver Apprenticeships, Train to Gain, Train to Gain Enhancement, Foundation Learning (FL), Employability Skills to unemployed learners and a range of European Social Fund (ESF) funded programmes. ITS continues to broaden their training offer to respond to local business needs. Most of ITS' training provision is fully or partially government funded but the organisation has started to offer commercial full fee training.

ITS' main reasons for joining the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme were to gain experience in using the Apprenticeship Improvement and Development (AID) tool in order to identify any areas of improvement and also to gain support and networking opportunities with outstanding providers.

Addressing priority areas

As part of the SER programme, ITS completed the Employer Responsiveness Framework to help them identify priority areas for development. Consultancy visits and master classes have given staff the opportunity to address these priority areas. The identified priorities included supporting employers to recognize the business benefits of training and how ITS can record and measure the impact of the training during and at the completion of the programme. ITS also want to develop their offer to employers to meet the Training Quality Standard (TQS) and gain accreditation.



An ITS trainee in a supermarket workplace

ITS has now implemented a revised Training Needs Analysis to include the business benefits and by the end of March 2011 they will be in a position to undertake the first evaluation. ITS has made changes to employer services and identified further changes, mainly with the handover of the training solution from the business development team to the delivery team.

The customised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) session supported the providers sub contracted by ITS to reflect on their own practices against the Common Inspection Framework and against 'Outstanding' providers. The feedback from the subcontractors was extremely positive and each provider has started to develop an action plan to improve the quality of their provision. Providers stated that the session was "useful and relevant" to their role and they have a "much better understanding of inspection processes and expectations."

Participating in the SER programme has also helped to raise the providers' awareness of the responsibility and accountability of holding an Apprenticeship contract and the impact this will have on their ability to remain a contract holder in the future. Participating in the programme has also helped ITS realise how important it is to ensure there are rigorous monitoring controls in place and action these to realistic timescales.

...the [CPD] session was "useful and relevant" to their role and they have a "much better understanding of inspection processes and expectations".

Business Impact

Skills and Employer Responsiveness programme makes an impact on Business Impact UK

Business Impact UK (BIUK) is a national independent learning provider, based in the North East of England, delivering a wide range of Apprenticeship programmes. BIUK takes a consultative approach to analysing the needs of clients and their current client base comprises large national employers, together with a range of small and medium enterprises.

Various staff members from BIUK have taken advantage of the Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs) and master classes available through the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme in the North East. BIUK have also been working with a peer adviser to map out and develop BIUK's 'employer journey'.

The work completed on the Employer Journey has been extremely beneficial to the organisation and many changes have been made to current processes as a result of the process mapping that was carried out as part of the programme. Audrey Howells, central services manager, comments,

"I was really impressed with the way that the peer adviser was able to get us to think about our current employer journey and then highlight the processes that we needed to change in order to improve the employer's experience of working with BIUK."

BIUK is relatively new to the Apprenticeship market and the Apprenticeship PEGs and master classes have been invaluable, particularly in reducing inefficiencies and improving the learner journey. As Helen Wright, head of Apprenticeships, says,

The Apprenticeship PEGs and master classes have been invaluable, particularly in reducing inefficiencies and improving the learner journey.



"I have found each of the master classes and PEGs of benefit, in particular the session around reducing inefficiencies in Apprenticeships. As a result of this workshop I have been able to reduce our enrolment paperwork significantly and cut down on a number of duplications."

The organisation's marketing team gave really positive feedback to colleagues about the events they attended related to selling Apprenticeships and have already actioned some of the recommendations. Gemma Walton, marketing co-ordinator comments,

"I really enjoyed the master class I attended. It was both informative and helpful. I have used the information provided to help me in my day to day role and made some changes."

As a result of the work completed on the employer journey, BIUK intend to map the process of the learner and the Apprenticeship journeys to support further organisational improvements.

CMC Aust Marketing

Meeting the challenges of the changing landscape

CMC Aust Marketing is a Kent based National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Centre working in a Train to Gain Consortium with Canterbury College. The organisation delivers NVQs in areas such as Management, Customer Service and Business Administration at Level 2,3 and 4, as well as delivering European Social Fund (ESF) projects and Jobcentre Plus programmes over the past 12 years.

The organisation is proud of being really flexible and responsive to customer needs, and retention and achievement rates are well above national targets. The organisation is a small family business with three people involved in NVQ delivery.

CMC Aust Marketing became involved in the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme because they were concerned about the future of funding, their ability to meet increasingly onerous quality assurance requirements and also to determine if they could continue to operate as a business in the changing funding environment.

CMC Aust Marketing has been supported on the SER programme by a peer adviser from another independent training provider facing similar issues and challenges. The peer adviser has helped the organisation to tackle issues around quality assurance and consider business development prospects for the organisation. This has resulted in the production of an action plan and new ways of working being implemented.

Apprenticeships in NVQ subjects

As a result of taking part in the SER programme CMC Aust Marketing has decided that there is a future for the business in the changing funding climate and the main decision has been to progress to offering Apprenticeships in NVQ subjects in partnership with Canterbury College.

Kate Fairweather, proprietor of CMC Aust Marketing, comments, "This was an area we felt we could not go into – it seemed all too difficult. However with our peer adviser's prompting and support, and discussions with colleagues from other NVQ Centres we have realised that our

business model of workplace delivery can work for Apprenticeships."

The organisation has also begun discussions with Canterbury College to gain their expert input on the Key and Functional Skills delivery of Apprenticeships.

CMC Aust Marketing is also using the eLMI (labour market information) tool available through the SER programme to identify potential target customers in their operating area to forecast potential sales and plan its marketing strategy with a view to offering Apprenticeships in the next academic year.

To sum up the benefits of participating in the SER programme, Kate Fairweather adds, "Without this (SER) programme I would not have considered offering Apprenticeships and we would have had to completely redefine our business model. Instead we have a route to build on our heritage and experience for the next five year plan period."

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Apprenticeships



Essential Learning Company Sharing expertise, resources and knowledge has saved time and money

The Essential Learning Company in Stockport has over ten years experience of delivering vocational training with over 90 per cent learner success rates. With the decline in Train to Gain funding, however, the organisation needed to consider future options and recognised the need to move into Apprenticeship delivery. Moving forward was daunting for staff who had preconceived ideas on how Apprenticeships ran and who was eligible, along with a fear of the unknown in delivering Apprenticeships.

The organisation saw the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme as a means of receiving support from providers in the same position, helping staff overcome barriers and providing guidance on developing provision.

The Essential Learning Company has benefited significantly from the SER programme. A highly skilled and experienced peer adviser has helped staff with planning and marketing of the new Apprenticeship programme. The peer adviser has also helped the organisation change its

The impact of the SER programme is significant... we have gained the confidence to move forward and start to develop and market Apprenticeships.

perception of Apprenticeships and has offered a range of ideas to make delivery meet current and potential clients' needs. As Frances Kennedy, commercial manager, from the organisation says,

"The Peer Adviser has set us on our way and allowed us not to make the mistakes his organisation made. The whole support process has been personalised ensuring that we work on what is right for our company, our staff and our learners. We can get what we want out of it, rather than one size fits all."

Networking benefits

In addition to the peer support, the organisation has gained ideas from meeting other providers who are facing similar issues. The master classes and Peer Exchange Groups have enabled the organisation to network with other providers and share effective practice.

As well as senior staff attending Peer Exchange Groups, assessors and business development staff also had the opportunity to benefit from the SER programme through receiving training on key skills and marketing. Frances Kennedy comments, "The impact of the SER programme is significant. Through the support, we have gained the confidence to move forward and start to develop and market Apprenticeships. We have developed a programme that will benefit us as a training provider as well as our learners, and this sleek programme will be of a higher quality and provide more value for money than we would have previously developed."

Sharing expertise, resource and knowledge has saved the Essential Learning Company time and money. The organisation has been able to start marketing Apprenticeships sooner than expected and are more confident in promoting themselves to partners and employers.

Cumbria Adult Education

Sharing expertise proves invaluable

Cumbria Adult Education (CAE) provides a range of adult learning to around 11,000 learners per year across Cumbria. CAE currently hold a Train to Gain contract and are making the transition to the delivery of Adult Apprenticeships.

The organisation's reasons for joining the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme were twofold. CAE does not have experience of delivering Apprenticeships so was keen to learn from other providers in order to develop a high quality Apprenticeship programme. Additionally the SER programme offers Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to staff whom, due to the geographic nature of the county and current financial restraints may not be able to access training easily.

With the support of an experienced peer adviser, CAE developed an implementation plan for the organisation's transition to Apprenticeships. Staff from the organisation have benefited from attending two master classes; one delivered at Liverpool College on Apprenticeships, and a funding master class at St Helen's Chamber of Commerce. Amanda Towers, skills manager at CAE comments,

"The funding master class provided the vital information necessary to plan for the changes needed to programmes and paperwork for 2011/12."

Trainers and assessors in the organisation have also benefited from training delivered by Burnley College on what is needed to develop and deliver Apprenticeships.

The sharing of ideas and resources is a core theme on the SER programme. The peer adviser supporting CAE has shared materials and approaches from his own organisation's Apprenticeship programme. This has saved CAE invaluable time and resources by building on the lessons learnt elsewhere, particularly in marketing Apprenticeship programmes to employers.

"With the help of the SER Programme CAE have made good progress in our transition to deliver Adult Apprenticeships." said Amanda Towers.

HP Enterprise Services UK Ltd

HP develops their first open and honest SAR as a result of Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme support

HP Enterprise Services UK Ltd. is a business group within HP, the global Information Technology (IT) organisation. The company started their first IT Apprenticeship in the UK in 2009 with the programme taking on a further cohort in November 2010.

The Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme was recommended to HP by the Skills Funding Agency. The programme was seen as providing an excellent opportunity for an organisation new to Apprenticeships to network and gain additional knowledge to enhance their Apprenticeship offer.

HP Enterprise Services has made the most of the support package available through the SER programme with attendance at regional master classes and Peer Exchange Groups.

Working with the peer adviser has enabled staff in the organisation to produce an action plan and establish key priorities to work on. It has been very valuable for the organisation to meet other providers facing similar challenges to them and share expertise and ideas at Peer Exchange Groups. The master class with specialist input from an Ofsted inspector was particularly beneficial to the organisation because as Nicola Luke, HP Enterprise Service's Apprenticeship Programme Manager, says,

"With the help of the master class and the peer adviser, we have developed our very first Self

The funding master class provided the vital information necessary to plan for the changes needed to programmes and paperwork for 2011/12.

Assessment Report that we feel is open and honest.”

Working on the SER programme has been a breath of fresh air for the HP Apprenticeship Programme with the external mentoring being a particularly positive experience. As Nicola Luke says,

“Working with a professional who can take a view of the organisation from the ‘outside in’ has been invaluable to our Apprenticeship Team.”

JTL Training

“Incredibly valuable programme”

JTL Training (JTL) is a national training provider working in the building services and engineering sectors. JTL currently works with 3,500 businesses and supports 9,700 apprentices across England and Wales.

Having worked on Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) programmes before, Mark Syrett, the South East regional manager for JTL recognised the potential value of participating in the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme and attended a “cracking” launch event to find out just how the programme could benefit JTL.

JTL have used the support available through the SER programme to tackle the ongoing issue of timely completion rates on Apprenticeships. Following the production of an action plan, specialist advisory visits have supported the development of a strategy as well as giving bespoke support to JTL to get the most out of their Management Information Systems.

Since starting the [SER] programme the company has made a saving of “six figures”, which is expected to increase... This has been an incredibly valuable programme for JTL.



Apprentices Mark Cottingham, and Christian Denness with Carol Monk MD of GM Monk, one of JTLs employer clients.

JTL worked between visits from the peer adviser to test out solutions and produce related documents. Measuring long term impact takes time, however development plans identified have been developed further and implemented by the company in an incredibly short period of time.

JTL has seen the impact of participating in the SER programme almost immediately. Since starting the programme the company has made a saving of “six figures”, which is expected to increase. Receiving bespoke trusted support has meant that senior managers supported the implementation of the necessary changes.

Employers have already seen an impact from the programme. One company has 37 Apprenticeships with JTL and they had a 2012 maximum potential of 10% timely completion rate. By making changes JTL have been able to work with employers in other areas of engagement, fully utilising the savings made meaning “they have a win and we have timely completions back above 65%.”

The fully embedded strategy that has been developed on this programme is now being rolled out nationally. It is expected to make more significant savings for the company and improve learner and employer experiences overall, as Mark Syrett says,

“This has been an incredibly valuable programme for JTL.”

Pre-employment – Getting people into work

Franklin Sixth Form College

Small Steps and Giant Leaps - a Journey towards Apprenticeships

Franklin College is an unusual combination of Sixth Form College, providing learning to over 1500 16-18 year olds in Grimsby, and also a successful provider of adult learning, including literacy, language and numeracy, vocational and non vocational courses.

The college's history of working with learners of all ages, employers and the local community meant that they were attracted to the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme as a way of accelerating their move towards delivering Apprenticeships.

"We have seized the chance to learn from other more established providers as we start on the journey of learning about Apprenticeships. We've always been proud of the work we have done supporting local individuals, businesses and the local economy too, and this felt like a way to take that one stage further," said Sarah Gillingham, the college's director of adult learning and employer responsive learning.

The college's main peer advisor has energetically supported the college's development by providing structured advice and enthusiasm, as well as signposting towards appropriate resources on the Excellence Gateway. The peer advisor has helped bring a more commercial focus to the development, as well as facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops on local labour market information (LMI).

Impact assessment expertise

A specialist adviser has also brought expertise in planning for impact assessment, and key delivery staff from Franklin College have enjoyed working with the adviser to plan how delivery can be most effective from the employer's perspective.

Joanna Code, curriculum leader for childcare, observed, "We've always felt confident working with the learner and their journey, so it has been an interesting shift of perspective to add the viewpoint of the employer journey to that, and to really see how we can *measure* the difference learning makes within workplaces, as well as its impact on the learner."

Many local schools are already working with Franklin College in partnership to develop aspiration and achievement, and the development of the workforce through the Apprenticeship route, feels like a very logical way forward.

After only a few months on the SER programme, Franklin College are already planning for the first cohort of trainees, on Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools to start on the new Apprenticeship frameworks in April, and there are plans to develop work in Childcare, IT and other areas in the near future.

We have seized the chance to learn from other more established providers as we start on the journey of learning about Apprenticeships.

Gram Training Ltd

Getting the most out of the SER programme support package

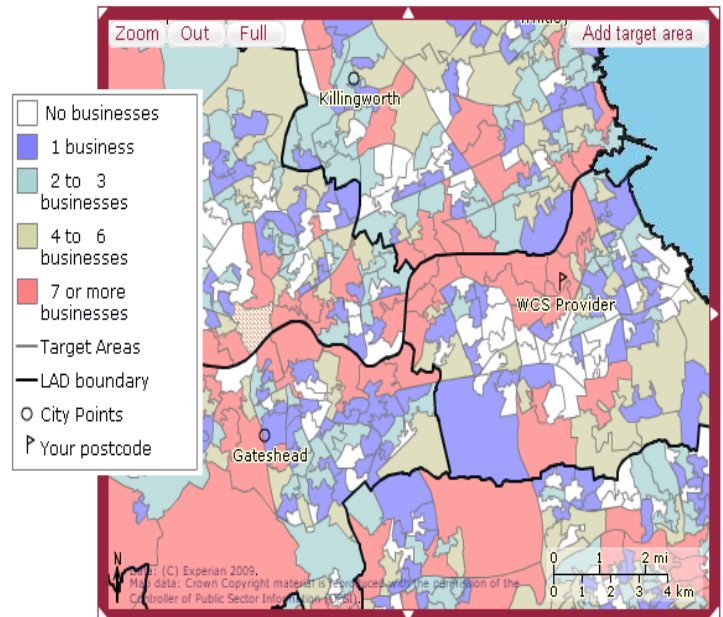
Gram Training Ltd is a small National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training provider based in Kent. Since the organisation was set up in 2008 they have trained over 600 learners with the support of Train to Gain funding. With the changes in funding Gram Training needs to progress into new areas which is why they became involved with the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme.

Following their participation in the SER programme launch event, Gram Training has taken advantage of the broad support package offered as part of the SER programme. The core consultancy visit was used to produce a development plan for the programme. The organisation found the support from their peer adviser really useful with many business ideas generated for them to incorporate into their development plan, along with strategies to improve their exposure.

The specialist advisory visits were valuable and included working with the eLMI tool available through the SER programme, as well as practical information such as how to register as a provider with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The customised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) module was used to update staff on the changes necessary to ensure this fast growing provider could continue to maintain high quality provision while learner numbers grow. Joana Carew, managing director, sums up the value of the CPD activity,

The SER programme has been especially good for us as a small training provider and we would definitely recommend the programme to others.



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Screenshot of eLMI data - Number of businesses in the sector."

"The CPD was a wonderful experience. At the beginning everyone was very nervous but they were soon made to feel at ease and everybody really enjoyed and saw the use of the session. The CPD session was a wake up all call for everyone."

The organisation has already started to change and improve working practices as a result of the training and the peer adviser support and as Joana Carew says,

"The SER programme has been especially good for us as a small training provider and we would definitely recommend the programme to others."

Peer Exchange Groups and master classes

Providers benefit from specialist input and sharing expertise

North West region

A series of master classes and Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs) are proving to be valuable elements of the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme in the North West region. These events offer the opportunity for providers and stakeholders in the region to come together and share knowledge, skills and experience.

All of the events have been organised in response to feedback from providers about their current 'hot topics' and so far sessions have included practical marketing, which is relevant to all strands of the programme and interpreting the changes arising from Skills for Sustainable Growth strategy.

As part of support for the Pre-Employment strand, there was a master class in December entitled '**The North West Vision for the Work Programme: Challenges and Opportunities**'. Presentations from the Skills Funding Agency and Jobcentre Plus were well received by attendees as they provided clear strategic directions and information on timescales for implementation of the new programme. Participants intended to use the information from the event to "feed into strategic planning" and review provision to see if a 'single pot' is viable."

The "**Selling Apprenticeships to Employers**" master class in December gave providers the opportunity to hear from The National Apprenticeship Service as well as a national training provider based in the North West on strategies for marketing Apprenticeships. Providers also benefited from an "informative and to the point" presentation from the Head of

Training and Development at Phones4u which was seen as "excellent Apprenticeship Advocacy" by one participant.

The January Apprenticeship master class and PEG was focussed on '**Reducing Inefficiencies in Apprenticeships**' and included a well received presentation from the Skills Funding Agency on common audit errors in the Apprenticeship programme. There was also opportunity for providers to come together in discussion groups to problem solve some of the 'burning issues' arising from the Skills Funding Agency presentation. Some of the expected outcomes from this event included:

"Improved paperwork and a better audit outcome"

"Tighter controls across the board on our processes"

"Increased efficiency."

Master classes in March

Feedback from providers has informed the topics for the upcoming March master classes:

Employer Responsiveness

8 March Developing responsive provision-working effectively with regional stakeholders at Knowsley Community College

Apprenticeships

15 March Apprenticeship delivery-meeting employer expectations at St Helen's Chamber of Commerce

Pre-employment

21 March Making Partnerships Work [The Work programme] at North West Employers Organisation Manchester

To register your interest in any of the master classes please contact the SER team on 0118 902 1950 or email ser@cfbt.com.

North East master classes and Peer Exchange Groups provide valuable networking opportunities

Learning and skills organisations in the North East are welcoming the opportunity provided by the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme master classes and Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs) to come together to discuss key issues facing providers. The events offer providers a chance to meet with each other and with key regional stakeholders to share knowledge, skills and experience.

The January Apprenticeship master class focussed on using labour market information (LMI) for commercial advantage and included presentations from the Skills Funding Agency and the United Kingdom Commission for Education and Skills (UKCES). Participants followed this input by completing a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis which 'enabled colleagues to explore and exchange valuable concerns.'

As an outcome from the event one participant planned to "talk through the issues with peers and relate the LMI information to the employer responsiveness framework."

Other events include effective marketing strategies, encouraging employers to pay for provision and identifying and resolving issues in process improvement.

Master classes in March

Feedback from providers has informed the themes for the March master classes:

Apprenticeships

7 March **Diversifying Apprenticeships: Growth in new sectors, higher levels and innovative models of delivery**

Venue: Access Training, Gateshead
Time: 10am - 3pm

Combined master class and peer exchange activity. This event will explore the barriers and opportunities involved in developing Apprenticeship provision into higher levels and new sectors. There will be an opportunity to hear from the National Apprenticeship Service on current policy, strategy and the regional growth sectors.

Providers are going to share their experiences of how they developed new Apprenticeship provision on the following topics:

- Expanding adult Apprenticeships and reshaping programmes so that Level 3 rather than Level 2 becomes the level to aspire to
- Moving into new sector growth working with Sector Skills Councils
- Level 3 and 4 Apprenticeships
- Making funding work for Apprenticeship
- Innovative Apprenticeship delivery- Fast Track programmes

Apprenticeships

18 March **Apprenticeship Improvement Development tool**

Venue: TyneMet College, Tyne & Wear
Time: 10am - 3pm

This event is for all provider teams who want to ensure the most cost effective means of delivering Apprenticeship. Benefits include:

- A review of how staff are deployed
- understanding of how staff time is used against processes of delivery
- ability to peer review staff deployment and compare ILR analysis.

To register your interest in any of the master classes please contact the SER team on 0118 902 1950 or email ser@cfbt.com.

Yorkshire and the Humber region

Two important elements of the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme in the Yorkshire and the Humber region are the master classes and the Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs). These events offer the opportunity for providers and stakeholders in the region to come together and share knowledge, skills and experience.

A wide range of events have been held in the region with topics ranging from 'Achieving the Training Quality Standard' to 'Delivery of Effective Work Based Learning'.

Providers in the region have been particularly keen to hear about the implications of the new Work Programme and the master class in December was supported by presentations from both the Skills Funding Agency and Jobcentre Plus, as well as input from providers on the programme.

An Employer Responsive master class on **'Facing the Challenges in the New Funding and Skills Context'** was held in November with delegates coming together to share knowledge and address some of the funding and delivery issues facing many providers currently. Comments from delegates include:

"The presentations were extremely informative and it was good to hear a range of views"

"Interesting and thought provoking."

The Apprenticeship master class in December on **'Marketing Apprenticeships Effectively'** had specialist input from the National Apprenticeship Service. The event was welcomed as providing the opportunity to,

"Listen to different perspectives from different organisations and share information."

When considering what she would do differently after attending the marketing master class one delegate commented,

"Be more honest about Apprenticeships- how tough yet rewarding they are."

A sector specific Peer Exchange Group was held in January to bring together providers working in the social care sector entitled **'Supporting Changes in Workforce Development in the Health and Social Care Sector'**. One attendee commented on the value of the event as taking time out to,

"Share best practice, network, develop partnerships and work together."

When considering the impact of the event participants commented they are more likely to "use each others expertise more" and "work with more partners" as outcomes from the event.

Master classes in March

Feedback from providers has informed the themes for the March master classes:

7 March - CMS, Huddersfield

Master class - Managing the Change in Delivery from Train to Gain to Apprenticeships - Exploring the implications of the changing landscape (10:00-12:30 followed by lunch)

Peer Exchange Group - Delivering a good Apprenticeship programme - Working with peers to exchange existing and planned practices. (13:00-15:30)

15 March – WYLP, Bradford

CPD – Using the AID tool for managing employer engagement. (10:00-12:30 followed by lunch)

Master class – Effective use of LMI for Apprenticeship recruitment. (13:00-15:30)

16 March - Skills Funding Agency, Bradford

Master class - Getting People into Work -An exploration of the implications of proposed changes in pre-employment activity. (10:00-12:30 followed by lunch)

Peer Exchange Group - Interpreting the Changes - The opportunity to work with other providers to plan effectively for pre-employment provision (13:00-15:30)

18 March - East Riding College, Beverley

Peer Exchange Group - Managing Employer Engagement for Survival: Getting the most from employers - An exploration of the potential of employer contributions including an opportunity to make best use of Training Needs Analysis (10:00-12:30 followed by lunch).

Master class - Establishing and Sustaining Effective Customer Relations - Looking at good practice from the perspectives of providers and employers with input from both. (13:00-15:30)

22 March - In Touch Care Ltd, Sheffield

Master class - Making Partnerships Work - Presentations and workshops by a number of stakeholders to consider effective planning and delivery. (10:00-12:30 followed by lunch)

Peer Exchange Group - Working Effectively to Develop Opportunities for Progression - (13:00-15:30)

To register your interest in any of the master classes please contact the SER team on 0118 902 1950 or email ser@cfbt.com.

South East region

PEGs and master classes make an impact

Two important elements of the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) programme in the South East region are the master classes and Peer Exchange Groups (PEGs). These events offer the opportunity for providers and stakeholders in the region to come together and share knowledge, skills and experience.

The master class in November on '**Encouraging Employer Contributions to Training**', which was delivered by Sussex Downs College, supported providers to develop their skills in designing programmes and using marketing approaches that would enable providers to secure 100% contributions to the cost of training from employers.

'**Selling Apprenticeships to Employers**' was the theme for the December master class, delivered by JTL in association with Thames Valley Professional Development Network. This master class allowed providers to consider ways of marketing Apprenticeships and to share ways of promoting the benefits of Apprenticeships to employers. Providers commented that they liked,

"The opportunity to ask lots of questions and learn together."

The topic of this master class was further developed with a PEG focussed on '**The Practical Implementation of Selling Apprenticeships to Employers**'. Attendees commented that the PEG was an,

"Interesting exchange of similar views and issues."

Providers in the region identified training on funding and pre-employment programmes as a priority and this was the topic for a master class facilitated by the Essential Skills Support Unit with specialist input from national trainer, Beej Kaczmarczyk. This master class gave providers up to date news on funding for pre-employment programmes and feedback from participants was very positive, with comments including,

"Expert information with the ability to answer specific questions"

"Up to date information and ideas for moving forward."

The PEG themed around '**Engaging with the public sector**' featured specialist input from the NHS. Providers appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with an employer on this topic and the event was as valued as,

"An excellent session with real projects described."

Events in March

1 March - 'Sub-contracting and Minimum Contract Levels' and 'Developing Effective Partnerships with JCP'

Venue: Berks. College of Agriculture, Maidenhead

Time: 10.00 - 15.00

Led by Thames Valley Professional Development Network

March - Functional Skills within work based learning Apprenticeships

Dates: **11 March - Brighton,**

23 March - Kent

25 March - Hampshire

Venues to be confirmed

Led by Thames Valley Professional Development Network and The Essential Skills Support Unit

With Functional Skills for Apprenticeships delayed again this is the ideal time to start preparation so that when Key Skills is phased out your organisation is ready.

The agenda will include:

- Comparing functional skills with key skills
- Teaching and learning functional skills
- Delivering functional skills in Apprenticeships, learning on and off the job
- Different approaches to delivery

Target Audience

WBL managers, co-ordinator and assessors who need to deliver Functional skills.

To register your interest in any of the master classes please contact the SER team on 0118 902 1950 or email ser@cfbt.com.

Low Carbon Project

Supporting the development of new skills in low carbon sector

The low carbon technology sector is of strategic importance for economic growth in Cumbria, both in relation to the nuclear new build programme and sources of renewable energy.

To address the current and future opportunities to develop new skills in the sector, Cumbria's four colleges, Carlisle, Furness, Kendal and Lakes, together with Nucleus Training Ltd, are collaborating on an action research programme for the Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) Programme.

The timing of the project is ideal, with plans already underway for nuclear new build at Sellafield, and increased investment in renewables, as well as the arrival of new qualifications and the current work being carried out by Cumbrian providers to secure support for renewables training.

Greater understanding

At the same time, the project will provide the five organisations with a greater understanding of the needs of the sector and how to address them, the sort of support employers require, and the future demand profile of the industry.

Each of the five providers is tackling a different key strand to produce a report that sets out a strategy for maximising the skills opportunities the sector has to offer, and how to maximise them.

Carlisle College has been actively involved in developing a hub bid to Summit Skills, the sector skills council, to secure support for the delivery of renewables training in the county. It is envisaged that its contribution to the project will be leading the development of a strong regional partnership

of training providers working in the low carbon sector.

Tackling the vital link between low carbon technology employers and schools, Furness College is developing a programme of opportunities for the two to work in partnership, including face to face meetings and events.

Given the large geographical scale of Cumbria, Kendal College is addressing the need for greater networking opportunities between employers in the sector, also examining the perception of training provision, and how Apprenticeship programmes can be developed to reflect employer demand.

Lakes College is taking a highly focused approach to the project, and is reviewing market demand renewables courses, including solar thermal hot water systems training, domestic heat pump installer training, and solar photovoltaic training for domestic installations.

Nucleus Training Ltd is researching how public procurement processes and contracts can be used to stimulate training and employment opportunities in low carbon technologies by including a commitment to training in contracts.

All of these elements will combine to form a final report which sets out how the skills needs of employers can be supported through more effective networking, funding sources, new provision, better links with schools, and the tendering and contracting process. While the timeline is relatively short, all of the five participating training providers are committed to creating a project with a significant legacy to contribute to the future economic well being of the county.

The Development of Training Provision in Low Carbon Technologies

As part of the current Skills and Employer Responsiveness (SER) Programme LSIS is funding a number of projects to support the development of new skills in industry sectors important for economic growth.

The project based in the North East is considering how training provision can meet the needs of employers in the low carbon sector including analysing the provider activity currently undertaken in this sector and exploring ways in which providers might work in the future to support sector employers to adopt new technologies and upskill their workforce.

Renewable energies and sustainable construction techniques continue to pick up momentum worldwide and will aid in increasing employment and economic growth in the United Kingdom. It is essential, therefore, that training providers can meet the demands of employers in these sectors by ensuring that training is relevant, timely and at the right level. This will be achieved by providing a range of bespoke training programmes so that everything from apprenticeships through to upskilling, knowledge transfer and retraining is in the curriculum.

As the low carbon sector is evolving some employers are unsure about investing in skills and which skills to prioritise. Research being undertaken as part of this project will try to identify priority areas.

The findings of this research may also help providers who want to offer renewable energy training as they need to feel confidence that the expected training market is sustainable. Project partners are working on different themes within the field of renewable energies.

Providing local solutions

The aim of the City of Sunderland College project is to consider local training solutions for installers wishing to undertake upskilling courses to gain nationally recognised qualifications in a range of renewable energy technologies such as solar hot water and solar Photovoltaic installation. These courses are aimed at current plumbers, gas installers and heating engineers as well as the general public.

As Graeme Heron, Lecturer in Gas and Renewable Energy, says, "During this difficult economic time it is important we are responsive to



the individual, local and national economy needs. By giving people the opportunity to re-train in new technologies we are supporting them to become more employable whilst helping to address regional and national skills needs."

South Tyneside College have delivered offshore safety training programmes for two years, and these programmes will be further enhanced by the new RenewableUK approved Sea Survival and Transfer course, which the college are developing and promoting as part of the project, including research with employers into which models of delivery would best suit employers needs.

Offshore Wind simulator

South Tyneside College have completed the installation of a new Offshore Wind simulator (pictured) that will enable operators to undertake their safety training in a realistic environment with equipment modelled on actual wind farm access ladders.

Northumberland College is working with RenewableUK, the National Skills Academy for Power (NSAP), City & Guilds and employers to gain an understanding of the New Wind Apprenticeship programme so the college can assess the demand for training to both public and private providers. The college is delivering bespoke training to unemployed mechanical and electrical engineers so that they can pursue a career in the wind industry.

Newcastle College is carrying out research to produce a matrix of providers who are offering training for the emerging energy streams, whilst Business Impact UK and PPL Training are carrying out research with employers to assess the impact that national policy and legislative developments will have on training needs.

Useful Contacts, Resources and Links

Useful resources

World Class Skills materials

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/ser

Becoming work ready materials

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/media/Skills%20for%20Life%20Support%20Programme/18ab7680-aBecoming_work_ready_FINAL.pdf

Employability starter kit

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/292645>

Move On employability materials

<http://www.move-on.org.uk/employability.php?catid=285>

Useful links

Training Quality Standard

<http://www.trainingqualitystandard.co.uk/index.php>

National Apprenticeship week

<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/Awards/Apprenticeship-Week-2011.aspx>

New CBI publication You're Hired! More Apprenticeships for Business

<http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/20100713-cbi-youre-hired.pdf>

New qualifications being offered by SFEDI

Level 4 Certificate in providing skills advice to business

Level 4 diploma in brokering skills advice to business

<http://www.sfediarwards.co.uk/>

Useful contacts

LSIS regional development managers
<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/improvementadvisers>

Skills Funding Agency
<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>

National Apprenticeship Service
<http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/>

Sector Skills Alliance
<http://www.sscalliance.org/>

Regional Contacts

North East region
Sue Toft - stoft@cfbt.com - Tel: 01625 879 144

North West region
Julie Mooney - jmooney@cfbt.com - Tel: 07887 777 136
Sue Toft - stoft@cfbt.com - Tel: 01625 879 144

Yorkshire and the Humber region
Sheila Morton - smorton@cfbt.com - Tel: 07887 777 198
Sue Toft - stoft@cfbt.com - Tel: 01625 879 144

South East region
Angela Wooller - awooller@cfbt.com - Tel: 01273 704 530

The SER programme is being managed on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) by CfBT Education Trust in North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber and South East regions.

For further information

Email SER@CfBT.com or Telephone 0118 902 1950

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/SER