



## Foreword

■ Graham Hoyle, Chief Executive  
Association of Learning Providers

‘The notion of the provider taking hold of their own continuous improvement agenda is one to which ALP wholly subscribes’

### **Structural change will help drive quality improvement**

At our recent Association of Learning Providers (ALP) autumn conference the Skills Minister, David Lammy, told delegates of the progress made by the Learning and Skills Council, and stressed the importance of building on it. He also referred to the anticipated role of the new UK Commission for Employment and Skills, a key recommendation by Lord Leitch, in securing a highly skilled workforce and helping to increase employment levels particularly in those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The subsequent announcement that Chris Humphries CBE, Director General of City & Guilds and a person who understands work-based learning, will be the first chief executive of the Commission has been warmly welcomed by ALP.

On the whole, ALP members like stable procurement and contracting arrangements, and welcome the signs of an increasingly joined-up approach between the LSC and Jobcentre Plus. We believe this better serves the needs both of employers and of individual learners. This is particularly true in respect of

the non-employed with few or no skills, because instead of facing a revolving door from welfare to work, more of them can progress to employment with training.

### **A demand-led system and Skills for Life**

Key to the success of new structural arrangements will be continued progress towards a successful Train to Gain programme. At our autumn conference, we heard from provider representative organisations from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa on how their countries are debating the merits of demand-led systems, but all agreed that meeting the needs of employers and learners should be the paramount concern.

ALP has submitted well-received proposals to ministers on how Train to Gain can be more effective and responsive to the needs of employers. The proposals include a recommendation that the programme should be more flexible, for example in meeting employers’ demand for Skills for Life, which is part of the overall offer for improving workforce skills. Our members’ experience so far is

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Sign up now for the Improvement Programme. Places are still available for:

- Workforce development – mentoring
- Whole organisation approach to improving learner success rates
- Embedding literacy, language and numeracy
- Working with people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

[www.sflip.org.uk/07-08](http://www.sflip.org.uk/07-08)

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that employers' demand for Skills for Life learning for their workforce has not been fully satisfied.

The Skills for Life Improvement Programme is an important element behind the success of Skills for Life. Its high evaluation scores from providers' staff and managers in the first year are a testament to its effectiveness, and we look forward to its further development as a whole organisation tool, placing the needs of learners squarely in alignment with the outcomes required by potential employers in today's highly competitive employment market. In particular, it allows work-based learning providers to make sound evidential self-assessment judgements based on benchmarking and good practice, and to access the support needed to bring them up to the level of the best. The notion of the provider taking hold of their own continuing improvement agenda is one to which ALP wholly subscribes.

### Quality improvement as a cornerstone of self-regulation

The Skills for Life Improvement Programme is one of several quality improvement initiatives valued by work-based learning providers in a shared mission to improve the outcomes for our learners and employer customers. As we enter a period of structural reform, it is sensible that all in the sector are involved in reviewing how we address raising standards still further.

ALP is a participating member of Sir George Sweeney's working party which is designing a blueprint for colleges and independent providers to take more control themselves of matters such as quality improvement. In a demand-led system, it is important that employers and learners can easily understand the indicators, which show how good the provision on offer is. Ensuring high quality Skills for Life provision must continue

to be a vital consideration of the deliberations as the reforms gather pace.

## What is the Association of Learning Providers?

The Association of Learning Providers is recognised as the voice of independent learning providers throughout England. The majority of its 400 members are private, not-for-profit and voluntary-sector training organisations. Membership is open to any provider committed to quality work-based learning (WBL) and it includes over 50 Further Education colleges involved in WBL.

ALP works closely with policy makers such as Government departments, Members of Parliament and skills funding agencies such as the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, Ufi and Business Link. ALP is involved in the development of Government strategy. Members' views on training are represented to the policy makers when new initiatives are being planned. The strength of ALP lies in the banding together of learning providers.

The Association is a subscription organisation. It is run by an elected Board of Directors who give their time voluntarily.

ALP representatives sit on the advisory group of the Skills for Life Improvement Programme, alongside colleagues from the Association of Colleges, the LSC, the Department of Work and Pensions, the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, Ofsted, QIA and others.

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