



alp association of learning providers

A review of the year 2008/09

“Another year has passed since ALP published its last review, and yet again it has been a year of relentless change and, at times, uncertainty for providers. ALP has continued to work tirelessly to ensure members’ views are heard and understood, to influence the Government and other strategic players, including the Opposition parties, as they firm up their plans for the future of the employment and skills systems.”



*Graham Hoyle, OBE
ALP Chief Executive*

Association of Learning Providers A review of the year 2008/09

Machinery of Government – the picture develops

The Machinery of Government changes that will see the end of the LSC have moved on apace and we have already seen the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) take up its place within the FE system. At last the Government – both ministers and officials – are now turning their minds to how the new arrangements will work in practice, and ALP has continued its involvement in the ongoing discussions both at the highest, policy levels, and at the more operational level, to ensure the system works as well as it can for our members.

Apprenticeship providers will not be forced to have up to 150 separate contracts ...

A big win recently was a confirmation from the NAS that local authorities, whilst having a key role in identifying the need for 16-18 Apprenticeship places, will not be involved in selecting the providers that the SFA/NAS will contract with to provide those places. Obviously providers will wish to develop appropriate relationships with the local authorities in whose areas they operate, but they will not face the daunting task of having individual contracts with each local authority – something that had been a real fear for many. The main issue now is the lack of visibility for independent providers to the local authorities as they identify their needs. For the last two years ALP has consistently argued the need for proper mapping of current provision as many local authorities are still simply not aware of the number of Apprenticeship places out there, and so will not include them as they calculate their future need.

Front cover photo: Michael Chrysof, courtesy of VT Group plc

Back cover photos: Courtesy of Acorn Training Consultants Ltd and Robust Training

... but E2E providers might be!

There are also still concerns about how contracting of Entry to Employment (E2E) will work for those providers operating across multiple local authority areas and ALP continues to lobby for a single national contract in the same way as Apprenticeships.

The final year of the LSC – but outstanding success for Train to Gain despite initial problems

Sadly, the complex business of winding up the LSC in readiness to hand over its responsibilities to the Young Persons Learning Agency (YPLA), together with the many local authorities, and to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and NAS, has resulted in real problems within the LSC, with too many LSC staff preoccupied with their own future positioning within the system. Faced with late contracts, faulty profiles and pressure to increase starts, particularly on Train to Gain, providers have encountered real problems in managing their own businesses over the last year. Despite these problems they eventually achieved a spectacular growth of the Train to Gain programme – a real success story as even the LSC acknowledges.

This success has come at a cost however, as providers have now been told that, having been encouraged by the LSC to grow their programmes, the budgets have been overspent. As a result of this funding problem, that has dominated the last few months, ALP has needed to divert much of its energy – and resources – into working with the LSC to avoid the worst consequences of the LSC's failure to properly manage the Train to Gain, and other, programmes. ALP will continue to work closely with the LSC to ensure its members – many of whom have already been forced to downsize their businesses as a result of these problems – are not further disadvantaged for having obeyed the LSC's instructions and worked hard to meet the demand of the employers and individuals they have found out in the marketplace.



Girls Allowed in Engineering Days courtesy of Training 2000 Ltd



LSC shifts 'open market' into reverse

We do believe, however, that one funding decision proposed by the LSC, to allow individual providers to vire funds in 2009/10 from the Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) budget into the Employer Responsive (ER) –Train to Gain – budget, is wrong. This move would give a tremendous advantage to those providers, mainly colleges, able to access ALR, and is in direct opposition to the policy of opening up the market that has been developed, largely as a result of ALP lobbying, over recent years. We will continue to argue that protection of one type of provider over another is fundamentally wrong, be that college, independent or third sector.

This latest move follows hard on the decision, announced while ALP members attended their national conference in May, that £83 million of new money for the LSC to fund 75,000 places for unemployed people seeking skills training would be made available exclusively to public sector providers. As a result, ALP is now starting to question Government and its agencies, seeking reassurances on their policy of opening up the market – rest assured ALP will not go along with the 'open market' being quietly 'ditched'!

Fears that funding for E2E might run out unfounded

At one point there were also fears that funding for E2E might prove insufficient for the number of young people wishing to enter the programme. ALP raised these concerns with DCSF Secretary of State, Ed Balls, who promptly wrote back to confirm, " that every young person who wants to study or to take up training will have their place guaranteed by the Government".

He also went on to state that, "There is also to be some additional funding for 16-19 places above planned learner numbers... I am keen that it is focused on those young people at risk of being NEET, who are most vulnerable in these difficult times".

The recession bites – and ALP argues it is time for a radical re-think on support programmes for the unemployed

ALP issued an important discussion paper, 'Support programmes for the unemployed – time for a radical re-think', arguing that the whole approach to getting non-employed people back into sustainable employment needed a fundamental review given the dramatic increase in unemployment that had accompanied the slowdown in the economy.

Plans made at a time when there was a strongly growing economy were no longer fit for purpose. Amongst other things it argues the need for realistic output related funding (ORF), that skills training is the key to job sustainability and suggests there should be employer led, job creation schemes along the lines of the Community Programme of the 1980s.

DSCF and the 14-19 agenda – ALP influence grows

Over the last year ALP has strengthened its links into the Department of Schools, Children and Families (DCSF) and now sits on the key policy and operational groups, such as the 16-18 Transition Board, as the Department works up its plans for supporting 16-18 year old learners. This all helps make the role of work based learning providers more visible at a national level.

ALP has also developed a close working relationship with the REACT programme, which is supporting local authorities as they prepare to take over the 16-18 funding and responsibilities for young people

from the LSC, and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) which sets out nationally how the 150 local authorities should work with independent providers.

Providers start to wrestle control over the funding for 'improvement'

This year has seen the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) hold an election for the places on its Council, the body which effectively directs the work of LSIS. There are now six elected ALP members on the Council – all keen to ensure that the support services LSIS provides will truly meet the needs of work based learning providers. Their efforts will be supported by ALP Chief Executive, Graham Hoyle, who started off co-chairing the Council, and became sole chair from August 2009. As he also chairs the National Improvement Partnership Board (NIPB), which recently refreshed the national improvement strategy for the further education system, ALP is in a very strong position to influence the development of improvement service offered to providers.

Future procurement arrangements for FE

As reported last year, skills had catapulted right to the top of the political agenda – and a year later they remain one of the top priorities, not just for Government, but also the Opposition parties. Given the strong possibility of a change of Government within the coming year ALP has therefore put a lot of effort over the last year into lobbying not only the current Government, but also the Conservative and Liberal Democrats. This activity – influencing the development of the main opposition parties' policies – will remain high on the ALP agenda up until the next election, and of course beyond.

As part of this lobbying activity ALP recently produced a discussion paper, 'Future procurement arrangements for FE', which sets out ALP's vision for a simplified FE system for the future. A system that would include a single, professional procurement agency, a preferred supplier regime, allowing those providers to respond to 'customer demand' from a mixed portfolio of Government funded products/programmes, and a radically different way of setting targets for and evaluating the success of government funded programmes.

Student chefs under instruction courtesy of VT Group plc



What else has ALP done over the last year?

Specification for the Apprenticeship Standards in England (SASE)

Concerned at proposals under SASE that Apprenticeship frameworks might be required to contain 250, or worse still 280, hours of 'off workstation' learning ALP led a concerted effort across a number of partners to co-ordinate the response to the Governments consultation on SASE. This has led to the Government reconsidering the definition of "off workstation" training.

As the recession bites ALP argues that providers must be allowed to make efficiency savings

As money becomes tighter and the Government is looking to reduce costs through efficiency savings – not wanting to hit the front line – ALP is arguing that providers must be allowed to use the latest technology to enable them to reduce costs without reducing the services they offer to their learners. One immediate example is the use of electronic signatures, which would remove the need for providers to make numerous costly visits to employers' premises simply to obtain a signature on a piece of paper. This is widely used in other industries, but the LSC has consistently resisted any attempts to introduce it by their contractors.

As we approach the end of this first decade of the 21st century there are many ways in which IT, etc, can help reduce costs and give the efficiency savings being sought by Government – ALP will continue to press for providers to be allowed to make full use of the advances technology offers and not be held back by outmoded, '20th century' ideas of how things ought to be done.

ALP Train to Gain Special Interest Group (SIG) goes from strength to strength

As members encountered the problems with Train to Gain reported earlier in this document even more members joined the SIG, keen to be involved as it took an active role in working with the LSC to identify the growing number of problems and suggest how these might be addressed.

Good practice guide – FE Works

Thanks To You

**FURTHER
EDUCATION
WORKS**

feworks.org

When the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills wanted to produce a good practice guide, 'FE Works', showing how the FE system supports individuals, employers and communities, ALP was able to provide a number of case studies from members, ensuring that for once an official document presented a more balanced view of the provision available, featuring not just college provision but also what the independent and third sector could offer.

Framework for Excellence (FFE)

ALP has worked closely with LSC and government officials over the last year to develop the FFE. With partners, it successfully lobbied for the 2009 results not to be published by provider, with the LSC seeing the first year's results as a shadow year. In a move towards co-regulation representative bodies including ALP have been invited to join the sponsor board and policy committee of FFE, which means that for the first time the sector will have joint ownership of the framework which is a key plank of the performance management system post Machinery of Government.





Simon Waugh, CEO National Apprenticeship Service, addressing delegates at ALP 2009 spring conference in Nottingham

Even more Learning Innovation Grants accessed by providers



The fourth phase of the very successful LSC funded Learning Innovation Grant (LIG) programme administered by ALP saw providers making excellent progress in developing their ability to make strategic and effective use of technology and e-learning to enhance the learning experience, boost learner satisfaction and improve achievement rates. As a result of the ongoing success of the LIG programme the LSC has released a further £3 million of capital funding to ALP to support an additional phase of LIG during 2009/10.

Where are Apprentices now? Often leading their businesses!



We have all heard of the industry leaders that started as Apprentices, but hard data on how just how successful Apprentices have been has been hard to find. As a result, ALP is undertaking a research project, sponsored by the Edge Foundation, to track the career paths of ex-Apprentices. The aim is to compile a comprehensive picture of 'ex-Apprentices' successes', using a series of case studies which will help to promote the value of Apprenticeships as a first choice to a successful career. The first case studies and exemplars will be available later in 2009.

Elearning website redesigned

During 2009 ALP's elearning website has been redesigned so it is now fully integrated into the Excellence Gateway. This has greatly improved providers' access to elearning materials and resources, and also information related to the Learning Innovation Grant (LIG) programme.





“ Another year has passed since ALP published its last review, and yet again it has been a year of relentless change and, at times, uncertainty for providers. ALP has continued to work tirelessly to ensure members’ views are heard and understood, to influence the Government and other strategic players, including the Opposition parties, as they firm up their plans for the future of the employment and skills systems.”

alp association of learning providers

One voice, representing providers’ views, protecting providers’ interests

Colenso House, 46 Bath Hill, Keynsham, Bristol, BS31 1HG

Tel. 0117 986 5389

Email. enquiries@learningproviders.org

www.learningproviders.org.uk