

INDUSTRY TO PROFESSION

*In order to implement the Sector Skills Strategy, the UK Skills Board for Parking is seeking to give more people within the sector access to learning opportunities. Part of this work involves encouraging those involved in provision to continually review, update and extend their skills. **Simon Brett**, with the help of **Dawn Huish**, a member of the UK Skills Board for Parking, explored a number of reforms affecting learning providers within the sector.*



This article is intended to make clear the connection between the Leitch Review of Skills, government policy as it relates to learning and development, and the implications for learning providers within the parking sector. The major stated objective of the Leitch review is to ensure that the UK workforce possesses 'world class skills' by 2020. This purpose links in very well with the agenda of the Sector Skills Strategy, as the parking sector moves towards greater professionalism, improved public perception and a culture of lifelong learning.

To place these objectives in perspective, the Leitch review estimates that in the UK, in 2005, 79 per cent of adults possessed basic numeracy skills and 89 per cent possessed basic literacy skills. By 2020, the government aims to increase this figure to 95 per cent of adults in possession of both basic literacy and basic numeracy skills. In terms of qualifications, the government aims to radically improve the numbers of people who have attained what is described as a full 'level 2' qualification. Level 2 is a fairly flexible term used to describe achievement equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A* to C.

Importantly, Lord Leitch recommended that public funding for adult vocational skills development (aside from community learning and programmes specifically for those with learning disabilities), should go through 'demand-led' routes by 2010. What does this mean? Essentially, the aim of the reforms proposed by Lord Leitch is to place the 'customer' – that is, the learner and the employer – at the heart of change. The Leitch report asks that each one of us take responsibility for directing our own learning and that "the colleges, universities and training providers that supply education and training (become) increasingly responsive to what learners and employers actually want".

For individuals, the intention is to support those who want to progress from lower-grade employment into higher-grade employment, and to improve the breadth and depth of their knowledge and skills base. The report speaks of 'skills accounts' as a means of assessing qualifications and abilities. Employers are encouraged to take the Skills Pledge as an assurance that "every eligible employee will be helped to gain basic skills and a full level 2 qualification".

In a demand-led system providers will be challenged on their credentials to deliver. One way to do this is to achieve Qualified Teacher Learning Skills (QTLS) status. QTLS status is a mark of knowledge and ability in learning provision. Those working in further education colleges are already required to achieve and maintain this status. Technically, private learning providers and in-house specialists in the parking sector need only attain QTLS status if they are drawing down central funding, for example from the Learning and Skills Council. In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Leitch report, however, QTLS status functions as an indication that candidates take their professional development seriously and they are committed to a lifelong learning approach. Teaching professionals who wish to attain QTLS status are required to:

- Achieve a recognised teaching qualification;
- Remain in good standing as a teaching professional – in practice this equates to

undertaking a minimum of thirty hours continuous professional development (CPD) each year;

- Register with, and maintain membership of, the Institute for Learning (IfL).

A number of qualifications can lead to QTLS status. Some people qualify as teachers first and then gain more specialised knowledge. Others begin with a very particular set of skills and graduate to learning how to share their knowledge with others.

Providers who are already qualified need to register with the Institute for Learning (IfL) and undertake 30 hours of CPD each year in order to qualify for QTLS. Once achieved (and, of course, maintained), it provides an avenue for the holder to apply for funding for those learners that are working towards their first level 2 qualification. This system clearly stands to benefit providers in terms of increasing the opportunities they can offer to employers with limited resources; employers in terms of having qualified, high-performing, motivated staff; and individuals in terms of increased access to development opportunities.

The TMA that is about to come into force, emphasises the need to invest in staff development and to protect learning and development budgets. The demand for skills development is likely to rise correspondingly.

Ultimately, the QTLS initiative feeds into the life long learning approach that the UK Skills Board for Parking is working to achieve in implementing the skills strategy aim "to improve and develop the skills, knowledge, qualifications and professionalism of the sector's workforce, and to create a learning culture in the sector".

This aim ties in with the Leitch review and the government's objectives. If the aim of making the UK a skills leader by 2020 is to be reached, increasing the desire for engagement is a vital factor. For demand-led learning to be successful, the people who express that demand need to understand the value of learning. The QTLS approach, on the flip side, is designed to encourage those who specialise in meeting these demands to be competent in a changing environment.

This is particularly important at a time

when the sector is looking at clarifying career entry points and progression routes. If the competence of those involved in delivering skills and knowledge is not considered we risk falling at the first hurdle. We need, want and deserve to have qualified, high quality and motivated people to deliver qualifications and assist learning in the sector. As a wider range of qualifications is developed across the industry and expectation is placed on staff to achieve them, we need to ensure adequate provision and support is available.

As the shift from the parking "industry" to the parking "profession" takes place, encouraging employers and employees alike to view high-quality provision as an enriching experience that leads to improved performance rather than an additional cost is a huge step in creating a culture where skills development and qualifications are valued. This will lead to an atmosphere in which those working within the industry are recognised for the service they are providing to the community. **PN**

Go to the Skills and Qualifications section of the BPA website (www.britishparking.co.uk) for more information about the work of the UK Skills Board for Parking, the Sector Skills Strategy, national occupational standards and parking qualifications.

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Try the following websites for further information and ideas:

www.ifl.co.uk

The Institute for Learning has more about how to achieve and maintain QTLS status.

www.lsc.gov.uk

The Learning and Skills Council is the body behind the Train to Gain funding initiative and the Skills Pledge.

www.ssda.org.uk

The Sector Skills Development Agency. This is a good place to read the Leitch review and learn about the UK's policy on skills development.

www.theipp.co.uk

The Institute of Parking Professionals (IPP) role is to promote, develop and maintain high standards of profes-

sionalism, ability and integrity among individuals working in the parking and traffic management sector.

www.traintogain.gov.uk

The Train to Gain site provides valuable information for providers and employers alike about how to access the funding available.