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An investigation of vocational progression pathways for young people and adults in building crafts and hospitality CoVEs

a London case study

Ruth Williams and Karen Yarrow
with Anthony Hudson and Maki Kimura

research report

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Executive summary

Introduction

Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) deliver specialist vocational provision with a focus on increasing learner numbers at Level 3. They aim to produce skilled and appropriately qualified workers to meet the needs of the economy by enhancing the skills and careers of those already in work, the employability of new entrants to the labour market and the employment prospects of those seeking work. CoVEs work closely with business and industry to deliver industry-relevant, economically important provision of a high standard; they also work with other providers and communities. There are around 60 CoVEs, or prospective CoVEs, in London.

Project aims and objectives

The principal aim of this project is to explore how vocational pathways have been developed and enhanced in two occupational areas – building crafts and hospitality – among 14–19 year olds and employed adults in London.

Research methods

The research was undertaken between October 2005 and April 2006 and involved a review of literature, an analysis of college data on participation and achievement, interviews with providers, employers, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and partner organisations, and focus groups with learners.

Research findings

Literature review

London has a population of 7.4m. It is home to 12% of the UK population, 29% of which is from minority ethnic groups. The city is a major centre of higher education (HE) and further education (FE), accounting for 15% of the latter in the UK. While London's CoVEs are leading the way in meeting skills needs, the proportion of employers training their staff at FE colleges is the lowest of any Learning and Skills Council (LSC) region.

Construction is one of the largest industries in Greater London, but women and minority ethnic workers are under-represented in the sector. A high proportion of workers have low-level or no qualifications and few are qualified to Level 4.

The hospitality industry, in London, is another large employment sector, with nearly 0.25m people working in hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism (HLTT). The hospitality industry has a poorly-qualified workforce, and lacks people with appropriate skills.

Since 2003, four White Papers have been published that are transforming the vocational education and training sector. These have outlined the government's skills strategy (DfES 2003), the reform of 14–19 education and training (DfES 2005a), the establishment of the national skills academies (DfES 2005a&b) and the programme of reform of the FE system (DfES 2006).

Since the establishment of CoVEs, studies have shown that they are effective in a number of areas (eg engaging with employers) but need to improve in others.

Data analysis

Since 2002/03, London enrolments on to Level 2 courses in building crafts CoVEs have increased more than threefold; those at Level 3 have increased by 51%. All three London CoVEs specialising in building crafts have experienced increased numbers of learners at Level 3 over the three-year period from 2002/03 to 2004/05.

Since 2002/03, enrolments on to Level 2 courses have increased in two London-based hospitality CoVEs, but have decreased in the other two. At Level 3, two CoVEs have seen an increase in enrolments, and fluctuations have occurred in the other two. Over the three years from 2002/03 to 2004/05, enrolments at Level 3 have increased by 18%.

In 2004/05, 60% of learners enrolling on to construction courses were white. In hospitality, 64% were white. The number of women on construction courses has more than doubled since 2002/03, although the proportion decreased by 1% to 17% in 2004/05. The number of women on hospitality courses has decreased, from 56% in 2002/03, to 48% in 2004/05.

Interviews

Building crafts

For most CoVEs, demand is high for Level 2 courses, less so for Level 3. Level 2 qualifications have currency in the construction industry, and there is lack of employer support for training after Level 2. Thus, the main barrier to progression for learners is the lack of currency of Level 3 qualifications.

CoVE engagement with employers is extensive, and relationships with the SSC are good. The majority of CoVEs in this study are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers.

CoVEs have developed extensive networks for disseminating good practice and knowledge externally, but dissemination *within* the host colleges appears to be less well established.

CoVEs are working hard to improve the representation of women on CoVE courses and in the construction industry, to increase the diversity of the learner population and to encourage learners with disabilities to enrol on courses.

Views about the impact on employment and skills needs of the Olympic Games, to be held in London in 2012, are tentative. There is a lack of clarity regarding the architecture and building materials that will be used. The general view among interviewees is that labour and skills shortages will be filled by foreign workers, and the pressure created by the need to build the Olympic Games' infrastructure within a set timescale will exacerbate labour and skills shortages elsewhere in the industry.

Hospitality

In London, two CoVEs have high levels of demand for all of their courses, while the other two are oversubscribed at Level 2. There is a lack of demand from the industry for Level 3 qualifications; Level 2 qualifications have currency, and this is the main barrier to progression.

Employer involvement with CoVEs is extensive, and most CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers. Involvement between the majority of CoVEs and the SSC is limited. Opportunities to develop relationships between the SSC and CoVEs need to be explored further.

External dissemination of knowledge and good practice is well established, but appears less so *within* the host colleges.

Some CoVEs have difficulty recruiting young, white males. Learners with disabilities are encouraged to enrol on courses, but there are concerns about health and safety with regard to working in a kitchen environment. Much outreach work is being done to encourage a more diverse learner population.

Views about the likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games are mixed and wide-ranging: labour and skills shortages will be exacerbated; skills shortages will be covered by foreign labour; most training requirements will be at Level 2; and some Level 3 demand may be created due to the shortage of workers with supervisory skills.

Learner focus groups

The learners who were interviewed were mixed in terms of the level and types of qualifications being taken, the mode in which they were training and studying, and their social characteristics, experiences and expectations. The views expressed were also mixed.

Learners mentioned few barriers about getting on to courses. Some difficulties were experienced 'on course', although the support received from tutors was found to be helpful. Many learners on building crafts and hospitality courses saw the relevance of the qualifications they hoped to gain as a way of entering, continuing and progressing in their chosen industry. Some wished to progress further with their education and training.

Conclusions

The nature of the occupational areas

The construction and hospitality industries are two of the largest employment sectors in Greater London. However, both industries are characterised by workforces with low-level or no qualifications, and Level 2 qualifications that have currency, which presents challenges to London's CoVEs operating in these occupational areas.

The nature of learner and employer demand

In the majority of building crafts and hospitality CoVEs, demand is high at Level 2, but less so at Level 3, given the currency of Level 2 qualifications in both industries. The challenge to CoVEs of increasing enrolment and achievement at Level 3 is a complex one, involving factors related to the industries, employers and learners. These are some of the areas where further investigation is needed.

Barriers to progression

The lack of currency of Level 3 qualifications in the industries is the main barrier to progression for learners. There is also some scepticism from the industries about the relevance of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), and some difficulties placing employed apprentices on courses.

Engagement with employers and SSCs

CoVE engagement with employers is extensive in both occupational areas. Good relationships have been established between CITB-ConstructionSkills and building crafts CoVEs. Opportunities to develop relationships between the hospitality CoVEs and People 1st (the SSC for HLTT) should be explored further, as SSC capacity is developed.

Higher-level skills training

In building crafts, there is some support for higher-level skills training for better-qualified managerial staff and project managers, and in relation to new building materials and

technologies. In hospitality, the needs for higher-level skills training are identified to develop management, supervisory and communications skills.

Widening participation

All CoVEs are working hard to widen participation to learning and improve the diversity of the learner population through outreach activities. While learners with disabilities are encouraged, there are concerns about health and safety in both occupational areas.

Dissemination of good practice and knowledge

All CoVEs have developed well-established and extensive networks for disseminating good practice and knowledge externally. However, in the majority of CoVEs, dissemination *within* the host colleges (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less deep-rooted.

The likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games

Views expressed about the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games are tentative. In both occupational areas, the general view is that labour and skills shortages will be exacerbated, although much demand will be filled by foreign workers.

Learner experiences

Few barriers to getting on to courses were mentioned by learners. Some difficulties experienced 'on course' were noted (eg managing time and juggling work with study) but support from tutors was welcomed and helpful. Many learners saw the relevance of the qualifications they hoped to gain.

Recommendations

For CoVEs

- Review and investigate ways of further developing the outreach work with schools, potential learners and their parents to promote vocational education and training opportunities in the context of the new diplomas and the expansion of the 14–19 vocational route. Opportunities for developing outreach work with the newly formed and emerging lifelong learning networks should also be explored.
- Review and investigate ways of further developing the work with employers to promote the relevance and benefits of training and opportunities for full-cost, bespoke provision in the context of Train to Gain.
- Review existing employer networks and investigate ways of further developing networks to include those employers who may not have previously accessed training in the context of Train to Gain target-setting.
- Review communications with employers about work-based learners and agree what each partner can expect (eg from the CoVE, the employer should expect regular reports regarding work-based learners' progress in college; from the employer, the CoVE should identify the expectations of work-based learners in the workplace).
- Continue to develop the well-established relationships with the SSC; where these do not exist, explore ways of working with the SSC.

- Integrate specification for accurate completion of the individual learner record (ILR) into the provider planning process and the New Measures of Success through the self-assessment process.
- Consider ways of improving the marketing of the CoVE brand to schools' careers advisers, Connexions advisers, employers, potential learners and existing learners.
- Ensure that teaching staff have recent and regular experience of the industry, and that it is reflected in curriculum design and development, and in teaching and assessment practices.
- Continue to develop the outreach work with community groups, schools and other organisations, to encourage diversity in the learner population.
- Continue to raise awareness and explore issues in discussions with employers regarding widening participation to learning and diversity in the workplace.
- Review (or explore where they do not already exist) relationships with higher education institutions (HEIs) to extend progression opportunities for learners.
- Explore with the relevant senior management of the college, ways in which CoVE experiences, knowledge and practices can be disseminated to benefit the practice of others in the college.

For SSCs

- Continue to market and promote the full range of vocational education, training and employment opportunities to schools, and education and training provision to employers – including the benefits of the CoVE programme.
- Continue to review current vocational education and training opportunities with CoVEs, other providers and the LSC to ensure that the industry's qualifications and skills needs are being met.
- Continue to develop existing relationships with CoVEs; where they do not exist, priority should be given to establishing relationships and ways of working.
- Continue (or prioritise where they have not been established) efforts to raise awareness among employers about issues regarding widening participation and diversity.
- Continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure clear mechanisms for bringing the national skills academies and CoVEs together to form effective networks and to identify gaps in the existing CoVE network.

For the LSC and other stakeholders

- Continue to review current vocational education and training opportunities with SSCs and other key stakeholders to ensure that qualifications and skills needs are being met.
- Fully promote and develop the Train to Gain initiative to ensure that employers are encouraged to make the most of the brokerage service available.

- Ensure that the reaccreditation process is guided by key regional partners, such as the London Development Agency (LDA) and relevant SSCs, to meet regional and local skills needs by providing high-quality and cost-effective provision which meets Agenda for Change priorities.
- Review regional ILR input and quality review systems, and prioritise development of common unique learner identifiers within ILRs. Establish clear data-completion standards for all providers. Publicise these performance levels and timelines for achievement, along with warnings that failure to attain these could jeopardise reaccreditation and have a negative impact on future LSC funding.
- Encourage schools to raise the profile of the vocational route among learners and their parents, and to promote the full range of opportunities through the 14–19 curriculum pathways in the borough learning prospectus.
- Ensure that local area agreements (LAAs) encourage schools to promote the full range of opportunities provided by building crafts and hospitality qualifications to *all* learners, not just to low achievers, and ensure that through the Children and Young People's Partnership Boards vocational provision is identified as of equal importance as the academic route. Set local first Level 2 qualifications as part of LAA targets.
- For building crafts provision for adults, on-site assessment and training (OSAT) can be highly effective, and the Train to Gain initiative should be used to develop delivery here. For young people, emphasis should be on the delivery of apprenticeships for the under-19s.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

In theory, vocational progression routes exist in most occupational areas from pre-NVQ Level 1 to foundation degree and beyond. The London CoVE network provides the key to driving up vocational progression. This project aims to explore the changes brought about by London-based CoVEs in two occupational areas, and the practical reality for the city's vocational learners in these two sectors – building crafts and hospitality.

CoVEs deliver specialist vocational provision with a focus on Level 3 growth, and are characterised by close links between colleges, other providers, business partners, employers and communities. They aim to produce skilled and appropriately qualified workers with excellent employment and career prospects, which meet the needs of the economy. CoVEs also focus on enhancing the skills and careers of those already in work, the employability of new entrants to the labour market and the employment prospects of those seeking work (including self-employment). CoVEs work closely with business and industry to deliver industry-relevant, economically important provision of a high standard. There are around 60 CoVEs, or prospective CoVEs, in London.

The government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) target of 50% of young people entering higher education and the 14–19 White Paper (DfES 2005a) demonstrate the national importance attached to raising progression levels. This project evaluates the specific barriers learners face at each NVQ level from Entry onwards. In London, relatively low work-based learner performance and a highly diverse and often transient population are combined with complex travel-to-study patterns. The interaction of these complex issues reinforces our need for a clearer understanding of what is happening in London 'on the ground'.

1.2 Project aims

The principal aim of this project is to explore how vocational pathways have been developed and enhanced in two occupational areas – building crafts and hospitality – among 14–19 year olds and employed adults in London. This project also:

- examines the support mechanisms for vocational learners within the identified sub-sectors
- makes proposals that will encourage providers to develop progression routes and identify gaps in the regional curriculum offer which may affect progression
- conducts an analysis of vocational pathways in the two selected sectors
- communicates lessons learned from best practice case studies across London
- informs regional and national Agenda for Change discussions.

1.3 Project objectives

Within the above context, the project identifies how well the selected CoVEs have performed against various factors. It:

- evaluates the vocational progression ladder within the relevant sectors by building up an understanding of the vocational progression pathways which exist, and by discussing:
 - how effectively the London CoVE curriculum is enhancing the overall vocational progression pathway
 - the impact of CoVE status on providers' curriculum offer
 - the extent of any gaps within each sector, in particular where these gaps are curtailing progression between NVQ Levels 2 and 3
- assesses the impact of the CoVE programme on learners and participation by examining how the selected CoVEs are widening participation and what bearing they have made within the selected areas. In particular how they are:
 - widening participation: specifically in terms of ethnicity, gender and disability
 - enhancing learner support
- measures the extent of external, vocational relationships by:
 - primarily, looking at employer links and SSCs; how employer-CoVE links have developed in terms of numbers, nature and fee income
 - also discussing collaboration with other providers (including schools) and partnership working with LSCs and the LDA.

In addition to the above, the project explores the likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games, to be held in London.

1.4 Key audiences

The key audiences are LSC senior managers in the regions and National Office, London borough directors, senior managers in London colleges and members of the CoVE network, the LDA, SSCs, Connexions advisers, the Higher Education Funding Council for England lifelong learning networks, and London Aimhigher.

2. Research methods

The research was undertaken between October 2005 and April 2006 and involved:

- a review of literature
- an analysis of college data on participation and achievement
- semi-structured, in-depth interviews with providers, employers, SSCs and partner organisations
- focus groups with learners.

2.1 Building crafts and hospitality

In terms of clarifying what qualifications were relevant to the occupational areas that the project was concerned with, 'hospitality' was straightforward (it did not cover those concerned with the leisure, travel and tourism and sports areas). Identifying those for 'building crafts' and what was meant by the term was less clear. In discussion with the SSC (CITB-ConstructionSkills) it became evident that building crafts are largely concerned with the traditional trades, sometimes called the 'biblical trades' – bricklaying, carpentry and painting and decorating – as opposed to the 'technical trades' (eg architecture, civil engineering, quantity surveying). Building crafts qualifications tend to be NVQs at Level 2 and above, whereas the technical trade qualifications are inclined to be more theoretical (eg BTEC diplomas and undergraduate qualifications).

As far as possible we tried to follow this distinction. However, in discussions with some CoVE interviewees (and some of the partner organisations and employers) the distinction became blurred because their provision was wider, often covering the broader term 'construction' (which in some CoVEs included areas such as plumbing and engineering – both of which come under the remits of different SSCs). While the researchers tried to maintain the distinction, it was often the case that interviewees were more comfortable talking in this wider context. In addition, the literature review revealed that much of the industry-specific literature is concerned with the wider terminology. This does not present any problems for the research because many of the issues and problems experienced by the construction industry in general are also experienced by the building crafts 'sub-industries', as noted in the interviews.

2.2 Literature review

The literature review covered a wide range of literature from policy documents, through specific research about the occupational areas, to research about the CoVE programme in particular and vocational education and training in general. A full list of the literature identified is presented in Appendix 1.

2.3 Analysis of data

Data were acquired from a number of sources. First, the ILR was interrogated, but this revealed that:

- not all CoVEs were 'flagging' their CoVE learners (eg in 2004/05, four hospitality CoVEs were not flagging their FE learners and four their work-based learners; in building crafts, one CoVE was not flagging its FE learners, and one its work-based learners) and even those CoVEs which were reporting learners were only partially doing so

- the qualifications covered by the areas of learning were much broader than the CoVE qualifications with which this project was concerned (eg hospitality was part of an area that covered leisure, travel and tourism and sports; building crafts were part of the construction area, which included courses in mechanical engineering, plumbing, heating and ventilation, gas and glazing).

Second, a request was made to the CoVEs involved in the project for details on learner progression data, but this resulted in a patchy response, and what was received was presented in a mixture of formats, which made comparison difficult. Third, CoVEs were requested to provide data, in a template, on learner enrolments and achievements over a three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05) by CoVE course/qualification and level. Fourth, further interrogation of the ILR was attempted to extract data on widening participation. The analysis of the data acquired is presented in section 3.2, and is based on the resultant information from the CoVE request and the further interrogation of the ILR for widening participation data.

2.4 Interviews and focus groups

Interviews were undertaken with the relevant staff in each of the CoVEs. Employer and partner organisation contacts were also requested from each CoVE. Thus, the employers and partner organisations were CoVE-determined. We attempted to undertake two employer interviews and one partner organisation interview for each CoVE, although this was not achieved in all cases (one CoVE did not provide any contacts, and some employers were not contactable despite repeated attempts).

In terms of identifying partner organisations as opposed to employer contacts, sometimes the distinction was not always clear to the researchers (and perhaps to some of the CoVEs, too). While, some CoVEs had formal partnerships, which had been written into their original CoVE status bid, and other CoVEs had developed partnerships concerned with specific developments and/or projects, other partnerships were less clear. On the one hand, this could be viewed positively, in that CoVEs were not distinguishing between or 'compartmentalising' the colleagues they work with. On the other hand, lack of discrimination between the two 'key partners' may result in a general response to perceived needs rather than a strategic targeting of individual 'key partner' requirements.

Interviews were also held with the SSCs – CITB-ConstructionSkills and People 1st – and with the relevant personnel at the LDA concerned with the two occupational areas.

Full details of the CoVEs taking part in the project, and the interviews undertaken, are presented in Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

All research projects are subject to limitations in terms of resources; methodological approaches and methods also have their limitations. Some of the limitations in respect of our research are outlined below.

3. Research findings

3.1 Literature review

Section summary

London has a population of 7.4m. It is home to 12% of the UK population, 29% of which is from minority ethnic groups. London suffers from inner-city poverty, congestion, pollution and a high cost of living. Two of the five local LSC areas in London (Central and West) have the second and fourth worst unemployment rates in England, respectively. Four of the five local LSC areas are in the top 10 for the number of working population with qualifications at NVQ Level 4 or above. One (East) has the highest number of working population with no qualifications of all London areas.

London is a major centre of higher and further education; it has 15% of the UK's further education and 16% of its higher education students. Minority ethnic groups are well represented among the FE population; disabled learners are under-represented. Travel costs and time are significant factors for FE learners. While London's CoVEs are leading the way in meeting skills needs, the proportion of employers training their staff at FE colleges is the lowest of any LSC region.

Construction is one of the largest industries in Greater London, but women and ethnic minority workers are under-represented in the sector. The industry has a high proportion of workers with low-level or no qualifications, and few workers are qualified to Level 4. Both in London and nationally, small businesses or sole traders dominate the industry.

The hospitality industry, in London, is another large employment sector, with nearly 0.25m people working in the HLTT industry. Over a third of these work in restaurants. Most vacancies tend to be in the hospitality industry, which has a poorly-qualified workforce and lacks people with appropriate skills.

Since 2003, four White Papers have been published that are transforming the vocational education and training sector. These have outlined the government's skills strategy (DfES 2003), the reform of 14–19 education and training (DfES 2005a), the establishment of the national skills academies (DfES 2005a&b) and the programme of reform of the FE system (DfES 2006).

Since the establishment of CoVEs, studies have shown that they are effective in engaging with employers and other stakeholders, collaborating with other providers, meeting employers' needs and providing flexible learning. However, there are areas where improvements can continue to be made. CoVEs are an important part of the reform of the FE sector – nationally as part of the skills academies and Agenda for Change, regionally in supporting the LSC's 'London Plan', and institutionally in helping to define mission and purpose and in driving up improvement.

3.1.1 Introduction

The literature review comprises an extensive and wide-ranging search of relevant official publications and research publications and journals. The documents identified are listed in Appendix 1.

The literature review has been structured around the various aspects of the project. The focus of the project is on London and two occupational areas – building crafts and hospitality; these comprise the first two sections of the literature review. This is followed by an analysis of the policy context and the White Papers and reviews that are helping to transform the vocational education and training sector. The final section looks at research into the development of the CoVE programme and other, related research relevant to this project.

3.1.2 London context

London is a world city, playing a leading role in the UK and international economy.

(LSC 2006, p2)

London's regional profile, as outlined in *Skills in England 2004* (LSC 2005a), describes London as the second largest city in Europe, with a population of 7.4m, 29% of which is from ethnic minorities. London is also a major centre for higher and further education, with 28 universities, 12 HE colleges and 54 FE colleges. Like many larger cities, London has its problems. These include 'inner-city poverty, increasing congestion, pollution and the high cost of living' (LSC 2006, p13). The report also notes that two of the five local LSC areas (London Central and London West) have the second and fourth worst unemployment rates in England, respectively. Reasons include in-commuters being better qualified for jobs than local people, and the shift from manufacturing to service industries, which has led to a skills mismatch. In terms of qualifications, four of the five local LSC areas (with the exception of London East) are in the top 10 for the number of working population with qualifications at NVQ Level 4 or above. London East ranks higher than any other London LSC area for the number of working population with no qualifications (LSC 2006).

According to a 2004 review of further and higher education in London (Mayor of London 2004), London has 12% of the UK population, 15% of its FE students and 16% of its HE students. However, compared with the huge increase in participation in higher education between 1997/98 and 2001/02, the percentage of 16 year olds in education and training 'rose only slightly' (Mayor of London 2004, p57). In 2001/02 there were almost 700,000 FE students, of whom 61% were women, nearly three quarters were aged over 25, 77% were part time and 16% were full time. Minority ethnic groups are well represented among the FE population, above their proportion in the population, with strong representation found among black Africans and black Caribbeans, too. Students from minority ethnic groups tend to be younger than average, and more likely to be studying full time than white students. This latter fact is partly to do with age, but is also due to the greater likelihood of white adults being in full-time employment. The report notes that disabled students are under-represented in further education in London, but also in the country as a whole (Mayor of London 2004, p62–63). In 2001, 8.2% of London's FE student population reported a disability, compared with 8.9% for England as a whole. In London, 55% of LSC-funded students (ranging from 72% in London Central to 33% in London South) attracted a widening participation 'factor' (eg through the postcode premium) compared with 33% in England in 2001/02.

Travel costs and time have also been raised as a 'significant factor for London students' in the Mayor of London's report. The report notes that:

Further education is not just a local facility – many people travel long distances to study. Nearly one fifth of further education students at London institutions live outside the capital... This is more than double the number of London residents that travel to study outside the capital.

(Mayor of London 2004, p74)

Travel is one of many issues highlighted by the London LSCs' strategic area reviews (StARs), which have been led by local LSCs (involving local providers and stakeholders including local education authorities, students, schools, colleges and employers) and have been helpful in identifying specific issues relating to the London region. The StARs looked at the education and training profile that was on offer. For example, on travel, the following comments have been noted.

- Travel is perceived to be a barrier to learning (London Central).
- Learners in construction and hospitality have the longest journeys (London West).
- Construction and hotel and catering learners have the highest median travel times (London North).

Among the other issues raised in the StARs and of relevance to this project, and which reflect the variety of concerns in the different parts of London's vocational education and training sector, are given below.

- The construction and hospitality sectors are among those leading the growing economy of the area (London West).
- The area's economy is biased towards the public sector; only five of 12 institutions offer construction training provision (London North).
- More work-based learning (WBL) opportunities are required in construction (London Central).
- There are too few WBL opportunities in the area; the sector with the lowest take-up of apprenticeships is hospitality (London East).
- In terms of training needs, hospitality and construction are LSC priority sectors (London East).
- The area has a poor and declining WBL offer and poor performance in the quality of teaching in some FECs [FE colleges] (London North).
- There is not enough vocational education provision in hospitality and construction in the area for young people (London North).
- The apprenticeship success rate at both Level 2 and Level 3 is around a third (London West).
- Barriers to progression post-16 include the lure of a job, lack of advice on learning opportunities, lack of interest... (London Central).

- The creation of CoVEs across the area is seen as a positive development (three in construction and two in hospitality) (London East).
- The current pattern of CoVEs does not reflect the actual availability of high-quality training or existing employer partnerships (London Central).
- Vocational pathways and progression routes need to be clearer (London North).
- Only one in five employers reported having any contact with a training provider (London West).

To underscore this final point, the LSC's *London learning and skills plan* (2006) notes that while London has around 60 CoVEs leading the way in meeting skills needs, 'only 21 per cent of employers train their staff at a further education college. This is the lowest percentage of any LSC region' (p3).

This brief analysis of London's vocational education and training sector highlights a variety of factors that are impacting on and challenging the provision and delivery of education and training. This is further explored in section 3.1.4 on the 'policy context', which looks at the ways in which policy developments are transforming the vocational education and training sector and how these are being taken forward in London. The next section presents an analysis of the factors affecting the two occupational areas, both from the national perspective and that of London.

3.1.3 Industry/sector context

There is a vast amount of literature covering the two occupational areas, most notably from the SSCs. These documents tend to focus on the national picture; nonetheless they are important, and have been included in our analysis to help set the context. With regard to London, reports have been published by the Greater London Authority and the LDA. The issues emerging from the analysis are outlined below.

Construction¹

The Sector Skills Agreement for construction in England, produced by CITB-ConstructionSkills, highlights many issues relating to the skills and qualification needs of the industry, some of which are as follows.

- In England, almost 70,000 qualified new recruits are needed each year for the next five years to replace those who retire from, and leave, the industry.
- The industry is dominated by informal entry routes and temporary work opportunities for the majority of site workers, leading to a poorly-qualified workforce (estimates suggest that only 40% are suitably qualified).
- Women account for 10% of total employment within the construction industry (women comprise 1% of the manual and 31% of the non-manual workforce).

¹ Documents identified for the building crafts area have mostly covered the wider construction area.

- Minority ethnic groups account for 3% of workers within the construction industry – significantly lower than 8% of the total working population.
- There is a lack of data regarding migrant workers.
- Evidence suggests that the supply of ‘suitably educated and trained new entrants’ (p4) is not being met.
- There is a need to improve the quality of courses at FE colleges.
- Three-quarters of colleges are expecting building crafts courses to be oversubscribed.
- Of registered employers, less than a third are claiming grants for training.
- To achieve a fully-qualified workforce by 2010, at least 70,000 people a year need to achieve an NVQ Level 2 qualification.
- Self-employed workers do not tend to engage in training, and therefore do not achieve qualifications.

Similar messages emerge from research into skills training in the construction industry in England, conducted by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI 2005). This report highlights that there are simply not enough workers who are adequately trained. While a number of strengths to current skills training are identified, weaknesses are also reported.

- The retention rates of apprenticeships are low – the numbers qualifying are less than those enrolling (eg the drop-out rate for foundation apprenticeships is 40%).
- Few apprenticeships are employer-led.
- Few employers are involved in the training and assessment process.
- There is a lack of commitment and involvement in training and taking on apprentices by employers.
- The apprenticeship framework requirements are complex, and deter employers.
- Most employers are sole traders and small firms, and tend not to engage in training and the achievement of qualifications.
- Courses are oversubscribed due to shortages of insufficient workshop facilities and qualified teaching staff.
- Employers have little awareness of CoVEs.

To further underline these points, a national study of ‘intermediate skills’ (that is, those skills embodied within Level 3 vocational qualifications) and the skills required by a modern workforce in six sectors found that the construction industry – specifically house-building – requires NVQ Level 2 skills (Smeaton and Hughes 2003). The study also found that there is a shortage of workers with the required

skills, which leads to recruitment difficulties. Furthermore, it notes that there is little incentive to complete Level 3 training because employees tend to take up employment after Level 2. The authors point out that while CoVE criteria emphasise Level 3 training, Level 2 is sufficient for the craft trades. There is, however, a need for Level 3 qualifications for supervisors and site managers. The study also found that employers view NVQs with scepticism. A further point of note is that the study reports that jobs in the traditional trade crafts will not change, although the use of materials will evolve, requiring the use of new techniques and adaptation of training schemes.

Construction is one of the largest industries in Greater London. According to a report from the Greater London Authority (2006), compared with Great Britain as a whole, London's construction industry in 2001 had 16% of construction output and 11% of the workforce. However, London's construction industry suffers from a number of constraints, and one of these is a workforce with the necessary skills. The report presents the following profile of London's construction workforce.

- Compared with London's workforce as a whole, the construction workforce is 10% female and 13% from black or minority ethnic groups – this is unrepresentative of London's workforce (43% and 21%, respectively).
- The construction workforce has a slightly higher share of older workers (49% are over the age of 40, compared with 43% for all sectors).
- 23% of London's construction workers commute from other regions of Great Britain (particularly the south east and east of England); this compares with an average of 15% for all London's workers.
- Few workers are qualified to Level 4 (16%, compared with the London average of 38%) and construction has a high share of workers with low-level or no qualifications (29%, compared with the London average of 18%).
- Construction employers in London report more skills shortages than elsewhere in the country.
- However, in terms of unfilled vacancies, only 10.3% of London construction firms reported these – lower than London's average and construction firms across England (12.7%).

The report also highlights that London's construction industry is dominated by small businesses and self-employment (as it is nationally). This brings with it a number of risks, including reluctance on the part of employers to invest in training, difficulties in releasing employees for training, and fears that skilled employees will move elsewhere.

As far as the 2012 Olympic Games is concerned, estimates of the skills needs are still in the early stages, but initial research by CITB-ConstructionSkills and SummitSkills (2005) indicates the following.

- It is estimated that the project will create 33,500 jobs over the next seven years, of which around 24,000 will be craft-based and site-based operatives.
- Spare resources (labour and skills) will soon be released from other key projects (Wembley Stadium, Terminal 5 Heathrow Airport).

- The skills legacy will need to extend beyond 2012.
- Given the intensity of work in the south-east region (eg the Thames Gateway), higher-level skills will be in demand (eg project management) to ensure a flow of work on projects.

Hospitality

People 1st, the SSC for the HLTT industry, has produced a number of regional and industry-specific reports. Of interest to this project is the London regional report for HLTT (People 1st 2005b). While this report covers a much wider set of occupational sectors than the one concerning this project, there are a number of facts reported that are of relevance and interest to the hospitality industry in London.

- Of the 29,000 HLTT establishments in London, in 2003, 67% are restaurants, pubs, bars and nightclubs.
- 234,400 people work in the industry; over a third work in restaurants.
- Over a third of the workforce works in elementary occupations.
- 14% of the HLTT workforce has no qualifications; 29% are qualified to Entry level or Level 1; 23% to Level 2; 17% to Level 3 and 16% to Level 4 or higher.
- Most vacancies are for kitchen/catering assistants, chefs, cooks, bar staff and waiters/waitresses.
- There is a lack of people with appropriate skills.

People 1st has also published a number of industry reports relating to hospitality (2005b–f). While these are national reports, one can assume that they are representative of the hospitality industry in London. Information regarding the workforce profiles in the hospitality industry has been summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The hospitality industry in the UK

	Hotels	Restaurants	Hospitality services²	Pubs, bars and nightclubs	Contractors³
Gender	Majority women (59%)	Balanced	Majority women (76%)	Majority women (57%)	Majority women (71%)
Ethnicity	7% from minority ethnic groups	12% Asian/Asian British; 6% Chinese	6% from minority ethnic groups	Low: only 2%	10% from ethnic minority groups
Age	38% are aged 16–24, 18% are aged over 50	56% are aged under 30; just over 25% are aged between 16 and 19	Majority are aged between 35 and 59, and a relatively high proportion are aged 16–19	Relatively young: around 20% are aged between 20 and 24; 17% are aged 50 or over	Relatively old: just over half are aged between 30 and 49; 24% are over the age of 50
Types of occupations held	Almost half work in elementary occupations: waiting, cleaning, bar work	Majority are waiting staff, kitchen/catering assistants, restaurant/catering managers, chefs/cooks	Majority are in elementary occupations: 49% are kitchen/catering assistants; 23% are chefs/cooks	Nearly two thirds are in elementary occupations, the majority being bar staff (40%)	Almost half work in elementary occupations: kitchen/catering staff (36%), waiting staff (5%), 20% chefs/cooks, 17% managers
Mode of work	Majority work full time (61%) Minority are self-employed (3%) 9% are in temporary work	Balance between full-time and part-time working Levels of self-employment are relatively high (12%) Around 10% are in temporary work	59% work part time Low levels of self-employment (2%)	54% work part time Levels of self-employment are relatively high (14%) 11% are in temporary work	57% work full time 9% are self-employed 9% are in temporary work
Qualifications held	Generally low: 15% have no qualifications; 51% are qualified to Level 1 or 2; 22% to Level 3; 12% to Level 4+	Generally low: 17% have no qualifications; 53% are qualified to Level 1 or 2; 20% to Level 3; 10% to Level 4+	Generally low: 18% have no qualifications; 58% are qualified to Level 1 or 2; 25% to Level 3+	The majority are qualified to Level 2 or 3 (51%); 13% have no qualifications; 22% are qualified to Level 1 and 14% to Level 4+	Generally low: 15% have no qualifications; 56% are qualified to Level 1 or 2; 18% to Level 3 and 11% to Level 4

Source: People 1st (2005b–f)

² Core hospitality occupations within non-hospitality industries

³ Contract food service provider industry

While there are some variations among these 'sub-industries', we can conclude that the majority of workers are women, occupy basic-level jobs, have no or low-level qualifications, and a high proportion are from ethnic minority backgrounds. This 'make-up' is reflected in the SSC's statement in the *National employers skills survey 2003*.

The sector is characterised by low barriers to entry, with many new businesses setting up without the necessary skills required. Salary levels tend to be lower than average and the sector employs a high proportion of women, part-time workers, people from ethnic minority groups and young people.

(SSDA/People 1st 2004, p1)

Despite hospitality's low status, an article by Baum (2002) argues that it is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the UK's economy. Hospitality work is diverse – horizontally in terms of the breadth of the sector, and vertically in terms of the range of technical, service and managerial tasks. The low status attributed to the sector derives from low wages, unsocial hours, poor career structures, informal recruitment practices, lack of equal opportunities policies, high labour turnover and difficulties in recruitment and retention. Baum's article argues that these internal labour market characteristics influence employers' skills expectations, which in turn influence the nature and level of vocational education and training provision. However, skills shortages are becoming increasingly seen in terms of generic rather than technical competencies; there is a demand for communications, people management and problem-solving skills. An argument put forward is that because the industry is so diverse, unanimity in vocational education and training cannot be achieved. Instead, providers should tailor skills development provision to meet the needs of the different segments of the industry.

The issue of diversity is an important one in both the construction and hospitality industries. In the case of women, the report by the Women and Work Commission (2006) has noted the following.

- 'Sectors with skills shortages are often those with predominantly male-dominated occupations [including] engineering, construction, information and communication technology, and plumbing' (p54).
- 'Women are more likely to work in lower-paying occupations, including the five "c"s: cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical work' (p55).

In terms of competing in the labour market, women face numerous barriers, including lack of confidence and skills to move in new career directions, and lack of information about what jobs/careers are available and the skills required. The report also highlights barriers in relation to age limits and rules on entitlement to training, and calls for greater flexibility in the delivery of, and eligibility for, education and training. Furthermore, the report notes that the 2012 Olympic Games, to be held in London, will create many job opportunities, many of which will be 'in occupations traditionally regarded as "men's jobs". There is huge potential for women to retrain to work in these jobs' (Women and Work Commission 2006, p61).

While the above analysis has shown the particular factors impacting on each of the industries, there are a number of features that both have in common, namely poorly qualified workforces, lack of skilled entrants and the currency of Level 2 qualifications. The next section looks at the policy context – the government's White Papers and reviews that aim to improve the nation's skills base and the

effectiveness of the vocational education and training sector. This is followed by an analysis of some of the research that has been conducted into the CoVE programme since its establishment in 2001, and other related research.

3.1.4 Policy context

Since 2000, a number of policy pronouncements have been key in directing changes to the post-16 vocational education and training sector. First and foremost in the context of this project is the CoVE initiative, which can be traced back to 2000, when the then secretary of state made a speech calling for a modern FE sector (DfEE 2000). The speech was made against a background of decline in employer support for apprenticeships and day-release schemes, the growth in competition between colleges following incorporation in 1992 and a perceived lack of strategic focus in the sector. The secretary of state called for 'a network of specialist centres of vocational education built around colleges or groups of colleges working with business partners. These Centres of Vocational Excellence will be crucial to the sector's new role in meeting the skills agenda' (DfEE 2000, p4). The colleges were to:

- provide high and improving standards of education for 16–19 year olds
- play the leading role in providing the skills the economy needs
- widen participation in learning
- provide a ladder of opportunity to higher education.

From 2001, the establishment of the CoVE programme began: CoVEs were to 'develop new, and enhance existing, excellent vocational provision which is focused on meeting the skills needs of employers nationally, sectorally, regionally and locally' (LSC 2001, p1). The focus of CoVE provision was to be at Level 3, with clear progression routes to Level 4 or to employment. A key task of CoVEs was to disseminate good practice in the FE sector and to create partnerships and collaborations among providers.

The types of partnerships CoVEs were expected to forge were described as follows: 'CoVE proposals will need to demonstrate active support among key partners including FE colleges, employers, employer organisations, RDAs, SSCs, trade unions, local learning partnerships, the Connexions Service, local education authorities and group training associations' (LSC 2002, p4).

Against this development was another set of policy pronouncements – the government's skills agenda – primarily aimed at England. In July 2003, the government set out its skills strategy in a White Paper (DfES 2003), which aimed to ensure that 'employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses and organisations, and individuals have the skills they need to be employable and personally fulfilled' (p6). The White Paper noted that economic productivity and competitiveness remained well below those of major competitor nations, and one of the main reasons was the persistence of serious gaps in the national skills base. Thus, improving the level of skills, particularly among those with the lowest skills level, was a focus of the government's agenda for enhancing flexibility in the UK. This focus rested on skills at Levels 2 and 3 and a concomitant raising of the effectiveness of FE colleges and other training providers to meet employers' needs by:

- putting employers' needs centre stage through support in accessing the training they need, and more influence in deciding how that training is provided

- helping employers use skills to achieve more ambitious longer-term business success through increasing productivity, upgrading to higher value-added products and services, and setting up new, higher-value businesses
- motivating and supporting learners through prioritising resources to help all gain at least foundation skills for employability, and providing better support for young adults to gain more advanced craft, technician and associate professional qualifications
- enabling colleges and training providers to be more responsive to employers' and learners' needs.

In its critique of the vocational learning system, a Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) report, *Emerging policy for vocational learning in England* (2004), notes the change of policy introduced by the White Paper from intervention on the supply side (institutions, curricula and qualifications) to intervention on the demand side. The report highlights the inadequacy of the vocational learning system and the need for significant change. The following reasons were presented:

- *too many individuals without the basic skills required for a modern economy*
- *too low a value put on vocational qualifications compared to academic achievement*
- *too few employers and individuals prepared to invest in training and to appreciate its benefits*
- *lack of coherence and direction amounting to a 'non-system'*
- *a relatively high reliance on volunteerism, especially with respect to workplace training*
- *a weak and underdeveloped role for social partners*
- *a high reliance on individual responsibility to seek and pay for skill development*
- *the use of a qualifications system to induce change*
- *a top-down approach to implementing change that has not always been accepted by change agents within the system.*

(LSRC 2004, p1)

In its conclusion, the report notes the government's change of policy to intervention on the demand side focused on demand at the individual level rather than 'demands expressed through the labour market' (p36–37), but this may be changing with the emphasis on better coordination among 'types and levels of stakeholder' and greater collaboration among providers (LSRC 2004). At the time of writing, the authors were of the opinion that it is too soon to make a judgement on how the new policy is developing, and on its impact – 'the current environment is in flux and very much under development' (LSRC 2004). Indeed, government policy has continued to evolve with three further White Papers (two in 2005 and one in

2006) and two reviews, and thus the state of flux will endure for the foreseeable future.

The first of the 2005 White Papers outlined the government's vision for the reform of 14–19 education and training (DfES 2005a). This recognised that while the standards achieved in secondary education were relatively good by international standards, staying-on rates after 16 were poor, and the biggest gap was in the achievement of vocational qualifications. Thus, the government wanted to see more young people continuing their education after 16 and a reduction in the numbers 'not in employment, education or training' – the NEET category.

The White Paper noted that while General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) and A-levels were well-recognised qualifications, their post-16 vocational equivalents were more obscure, not so widely available and less credible with employers: 'Although a number of awarding bodies offer qualifications that are respected, we are left with an alphabet soup of qualifications of different sizes, at different levels, with few clear progression routes between them' (LSRC 2004, p20). The government's intention was to enhance the status of vocational qualifications by providing greater choice and flexibility and ensuring that qualifications 'have value as routes into higher education and employment' (LSRC 2004, p45). For these qualifications, 'diplomas' were to be developed at Levels 1–3, involving employers and others in their development, and containing elements of WBL.

The White Paper recognised that this would require an enhanced capacity to provide a new system of vocational education geared towards young people's needs. It stated that this would be done, *inter alia*, through strengthening CoVEs and creating new skills academies – sector-based national centres of excellence that would focus on post-16 education and training supported by regional or sectoral networks of CoVEs. This enhanced capacity would also require strong, collaborative links between all types of providers.

Government plans for the next major phase of reform in improving the UK's skills performance and building on the two previous White Papers discussed above were outlined in another White Paper in March 2005 (DfES 2005b). This White Paper focused on meeting the skills needs of employers and the skills of adults in, or seeking to enter, the labour market. It recognised that RDAs were major players in integrating regional activity on training, jobs and business innovation and support (in pursuit of regional economic strategies), and the government was looking to the regional skills partnerships (involving the LSC, Jobcentre Plus, SSCs and the Small Business Service) to drive regional economic development. Specific actions included:

- providing employers with a strong voice in the design and content of vocational qualifications through the SSCs
- the establishment of a network of skills academies (linking with existing CoVEs and other providers).

In parallel with the publication of the 2005 White Papers were two important reviews. One was a review of the future role of FE colleges, their challenges and opportunities, commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the chair of the LSC (Foster 2005). The other review, commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, is looking at the UK's optimal skills mix in 2020 to maximise economic growth,

productivity and social justice, as well as the policy implications of achieving the level of change required (Leitch Review of Skills 2005).

The Leitch review is ongoing, although an interim report was produced at the end of 2005, focusing on the analysis of the review; the full report of the review is due in 2006. Among other things, the interim report highlighted the UK's excellent HE system and the promising reforms to vocational education and training. However, it also highlighted the fact that the UK does not have a world-class skills base, and its intermediate and technical skills lag behind those of France and Germany. Over a third of the adult population do not have a basic school-leaving qualification and five million have no qualifications at all. Thus, on the current trajectory, the UK's comparative position would not have improved by 2020. In addition, the UK's productivity trailed many comparator countries, and poor skills were a contributing factor. Global demographic and technological change would place an even greater premium on the UK skills profile in the run up to 2020. Even if the government meets its targets for improving skills by 2020, the UK's human capital would still fail to be world class. Thus, much more needs to be done.

The Foster review (2005), while celebrating the achievements of FE colleges, identified a number of problems within the sector, including the 200,000 16–18 year old NEETs, 14% of adults with no qualifications and too many students failing to achieve the qualifications they aimed for. It also recognised a number of factors outside colleges' control:

- demographic trends and the need to re-skill older workers
- the need to train new immigrants
- schools exporting too many failing pupils
- lack of local strategy following incorporation, and a potential conflict of strategic responsibility between individual colleges and local LSCs
- confusion about Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and LSC roles
- too many initiatives in the sector.

The review concluded that there was a need to simplify the sector to make it more coherent, along with a need to clarify purpose. The review recommended, *inter alia*, that the purpose should focus on skills, vocational learning and employability to reduce confusion of responsibility and competition between colleges, schools and universities. Quality and the rationalisation of current arrangements were vital in supporting this purpose. Better learning pathways, information, advice and guidance, financial incentives for learners, and greater choice and flexibility were required. Added to this, the current system of qualifications required simplification to reduce confusion.

A further White Paper was published in 2006, *Further education: raising skills, improving life chances*, which builds on 'secondary school reforms, the 14–19 and skills strategies, the Success for All programme, and the LSC's Agenda for Change reforms' (DfES 2006, p5) and sets out a programme of reform of the FE system. It also responds to the Foster review. It identifies the 'economic mission of the sector at the heart of its role' (p6) and highlights CoVEs as being significant factors in the delivery of that mission. It introduces a new CoVE standard, whereby institutions must demonstrate the role played by their CoVEs 'in defining the mission and

purpose of the institution and in driving improvement across the whole institution' (p24). Also part of this new standard are 'effective leadership and management of the institution as a whole', 'concentrations of CoVEs in related disciplines in individual institutions', and 'excellence in working with employers' (DfES 2006,).

The focus of this project is London. Two important LSC initiatives have helped to determine how the vocational education and training sector in London will respond to the challenges described above. The first is Agenda for Change, launched in 2004, which is the 'fundamental programme of transformation for the learning and skills sector' (LSC 2004). The aim of the programme is to respond to the needs of learners, employers, communities and the economy under seven themes:

- skills for employers
- quality
- funding
- business excellence
- data
- reputation
- transformation within the LSC.

The second initiative is the LSC's *London learning and skills plan* (2006), which sets out seven priorities for London, and these identify where change needs to take place. One of these is to transform the learning and skills sector through Agenda for Change by enabling providers to become more responsive and effective in meeting employers' and learners' needs. The plan notes of the construction industry that 'large regeneration initiatives across London are causing skills shortages and there are low levels of basic skills in the existing workforce and need for Level 3 site management' (p6). Of the hospitality (and tourism) industry it notes that it is a large employment sector with low-level basic skills (Levels 1 and 2) (LSC 2006).

From the above discussion, the vocational education and training sector is facing a number of challenges, which include responding to the government's skills agenda by closing the gaps in the skills base and enhancing the nation's economic competitiveness, improving the effectiveness of the FE sector and other training providers, putting the economic mission at the heart of the FE sector's role, and enhancing the status of vocational qualifications. As noted above, at the forefront of this reform programme are the CoVEs; first, at a national level and their role in the skills academies; secondly, at the regional level and their role in the LSC's London plan (2006); thirdly, at the institutional level and their role in helping to define the institution's missions and purpose and driving improvement across the whole institution. The next section looks at the development of CoVEs since their inception in 2001, and the research and evaluation studies that have charted their progress and impact.

3.1.5 CoVE context

There are a number of key studies on the development of CoVEs that have researched and evaluated their progress. The *Measuring progress* study (GHK Consulting 2003) surveyed 32 CoVEs and their stakeholders (one hospitality and three construction CoVEs were involved, and six CoVEs were in London). The following points were reported.

- The majority of employers were satisfied with the services provided by CoVEs, and there was substantial employer engagement in curriculum

design and choice of delivery methods once CoVE status was granted, although there had been little employer input at the early stage.

- The identification and tracking of changes in skills needs is quite crucial as CoVEs need to keep abreast of changes in the demand at sectoral level. All sectoral stakeholders have a role to play in this, but few had been involved at the CoVE development phase. Use of labour market information (LMI) was limited.
- There were limited contacts with RDAs, Business Links and Chambers of Commerce, but 56% of CoVEs reported contacts with National Training Organisations and SSCs that were overall described as positive.
- 62% of CoVEs forecast increases in Level 3 achievement, but few CoVEs had data on progression into employment, and there was little monitoring of advancement into employment. Systems to track learners' progress once the course is completed and progression within employment were needed.
- All CoVEs had plans in place to widen participation, and were optimistic about it. However, the extent to which participation had increased at Level 3 was limited, possibly because people new to learning were coming into CoVEs at Levels 1 and 2. In some cases, a limited amount of data was being collected, and therefore it was not possible to gauge the extent to which participation was being widened. Better systems to track widening participation were needed.
- The programme had generated a positive increase in collaboration both between CoVEs and with other non-CoVE providers. Many CoVEs were contacted by other providers for information and advice on good practice.
- Employers were positive about CoVEs' ability to meet their needs in terms of course provision and delivery. Most wanted to see 'more short, bite-sized courses, tailor made to their needs and delivered in a flexible manner' (p18). Innovation was occurring in terms of new course provision and delivery methods. CoVEs, however, reported that engaging with employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), remained challenging.
- There was evidence that employers' attitudes were improving, and that an increasing number were contacting CoVEs either for information or to use their services.

The impact of the CoVE programme study (GHK Consulting and Ipsos UK 2004) explored employers', other training providers' and key stakeholders' perceptions of CoVEs. Employers participating in the survey included those from the construction and hospitality sectors, some of who were based in London. However, the findings reported are generic, not sector-specific.

- 72% of respondents stated, they made regular use of a CoVE although it appears that over 50% of those who used CoVE training provision were already doing so prior to the provider becoming a CoVE.
- CoVE flexibility of learning provision was appreciated.

- The most important factors influencing employers' decisions to use CoVEs' training were 'providers' ability to offer training tailored to specific needs, timed to suit both businesses and employees, and reputation for higher quality services' (p25). Reputation seemed to have greater influence on employers than the CoVE brand.
- The vast majority of employers reported benefits from using CoVEs' training, ranging from acquiring business-relevant skills and experience, through developing staff skills to work with industry-standard machinery, to introducing new working practices.
- Employers' engagement with CoVEs had impacted on perceptions of vocational education and training; positive comments focused on accessibility and relevance and quality of the training at CoVEs. 60%, however, stated that they would probably use other FE provision in the future.
- The involvement of RDAs has increased over time. RDAs now see CoVEs as important, strategic partners.
- Non-CoVE providers identified some benefits deriving from collaborating with CoVEs, namely 'widening discussions on strategic issues, sharing information on curriculum planning and delivery, sharing delivery and learning targets and receiving expert advice from CoVEs' (p5).

The ALI/Ofsted report (2005) of a survey of 40 CoVEs across England highlights the following issues relating to construction and hospitality CoVEs.

In construction:

- Student numbers have increased and provision has broadened, but a key barrier to recruitment at Level 3 is the currency of Level 2 qualifications.
- CoVE achievement levels vary; there is little progression beyond Level 3.
- CoVE facilities have also improved, and with employers' contributions.
- CoVEs have introduced greater flexibility in attendance modes.
- A quarter of CoVEs had not sufficiently marketed the CoVE brand to employers.

In hospitality:

- Recruitment has increased, but at Level 2 rather than Level 3; however, good progression routes are in place.
- CoVE achievement rates at Level 3 have remained stagnant, and there was poor retention on long courses in a third of the CoVEs surveyed.
- CoVE facilities have significantly improved since designation, but in a third there has been little employer investment.

- Two thirds of CoVEs had developed new programmes to meet employers' needs.
- A third of employers did not understand the significance of CoVE status.

Research into the CoVE programme has identified a number of positive features, including substantial engagement with employers, increased involvement with stakeholders, increased collaboration between CoVEs and with non-CoVEs, meeting employers' needs and flexibility in learning provision. There are, however, some areas where improvements have also been identified, which include use of LMI, improved monitoring of learners' progress and widening participation initiatives, improving recruitment to, and achievement rates at, Level 3, and the currency of Level 2 qualifications.

The next section looks at a set of research that has not been easy to combine with the preceding sections of this review. This includes research into apprenticeships, learner satisfaction and employers' perspectives of the vocational education and training sector.

3.1.6 Other related research

A number of studies have been undertaken on apprenticeships. Apprenticeships have been described as 'a structured programme of vocational preparation, sponsored by an employer, juxtaposing part-time education with on-the-job training and work experience, leading to a recognised vocational qualification at craft or higher level' (McIntosh 2005, p251). Modern apprenticeships, introduced in 1994, are seen as an important factor in the government's economic and social policies through improving productivity and economic growth, and through helping young people's transition from school to work and/or higher education (DfES and LSC 2004). The report of the Apprenticeship Taskforce (Kenyon 2005) surveyed employers' opinions about the cost effectiveness of apprenticeships. All the employers that took part were large organisations, and the findings were positive, including the observation that apprentices provided 'added value', which increases throughout their training, and thus are more productive than non-apprentices. Another report investigated apprenticeships and minority ethnic learners and found that trial periods or tasters are important in matching employers and potential apprentices (Hughes *et al.* 2005). It also found that white and non-white learners tend to value the same things, such as on-the-job and off-the-job training, and earning while learning. A criticism from all learners regardless of ethnicity was the lack of information about the apprenticeship route as a career option at school.

In line with this latter finding, other research in this area has found careers information, advice and guidance to be biased towards the sixth form and university route, and that information on apprenticeships was inadequate (see for example, Perez-del-Aguila *et al.* 2006, Bowers-Brown 2004 and McIntosh 2005). More generally, the review of careers education and guidance (DfES 2005c) concluded that it is difficult to access impartial advice in schools, and there is a bias towards academic routes. One of the key messages from the Connor and Little report (2005) was that vocational and work-based routes are largely perceived as primarily for low achievers. Other research has reported that some employers believe the emphasis on the higher education/academic route has led to a decline in the standard of applicants for apprenticeships (Bowers-Brown 2005).

A number of studies have focused on progression into higher education (see, for example, Bowers-Brown 2004 and 2005, Bowers-Brown and Berry 2005, Connor

and Little 2005, Faithorn 2005, Seddon 2005). The Connor and Little report investigated progression to higher education through Modern Apprenticeships. This study found that:

a relatively small proportion of those with vocational or work-based qualifications at this level (Level 3) progress to formal education and training at higher levels... In contrast, the proportion of those achieving Level 3 academic qualifications who progress into higher education is very high (mostly young people, using the traditional route to higher education).

(Connor and Little 2005, p48)

Of interest to this project are the barriers that were identified by the study; these include:

- lack of employer support or encouragement to progress
- calibre of vocational students
- awareness of the vocational route
- quality issues
- financial constraints.

A key message from the report is that success rates need to be improved within advanced apprenticeship frameworks so that more apprentices gain Level 3 qualifications.

Research into learners in FE colleges is represented by the national learner satisfaction surveys, which were carried out in 2003/04 (LSC 2005c&d). Of the findings reported, FE learners in construction are less satisfied with the quality of the teaching they receive than learners in other fields; only 49% were very or extremely satisfied, compared with an overall average of 64%. A similar finding is reported for work-based learners in the construction area; again, they appear to be less satisfied with the quality of teaching than work-based learners in general – 50% were very or extremely satisfied, compared with the overall average of 57%. Furthermore, 26% of work-based learners in construction reported that lack of resources and poor equipment affected their learning experience; this was the highest percentage recorded compared with other fields, and the overall average of 16%.

As far as research into employers' perceptions is concerned, a report by the National Audit Office (2005) investigated employers' views about how publicly-funded training could be improved, and whether it represents value for money. It identified four areas that need attention.

- Employers want a simple way of getting advice on the best skills training for their staff.
- Employers want training that meets their business needs.
- Employers want incentives to train their staff more.
- Employers want to influence skills training without getting weighed down by bureaucracy.

Related to this are the concerns about the general state of the UK's vocational education and training system that have been raised by Page and Hillage (2006). One concern is the 'voluntarist system of employer training in the UK, under which

it is largely left to individual employers whether or not they train staff, with few minimum legal requirements' (p2). A second is that there is 'some evidence that employers see the NVQ process as cumbersome and bureaucratic, with little relevance to "real" work' (p11), and a third that highlights the low completion rate of apprenticeships, with one of the lowest being the hospitality sector (p11).

To tackle some of these areas, the Train to Gain initiative, which commenced in April 2006, aims to provide a brokerage service for employers, funded and managed by the LSC. This brokerage service will help employers access NVQ Level 2 training, higher-level qualifications and non-qualification-based training. It 'will provide a comprehensive analysis of, and solution to, training needs. The analysis will clearly identify what will be funded by the government and what the employer must pay for' (LSC 2005b).

To conclude this review and to set the context for the next section of this report, while research into the CoVE programme has shown many significant improvements, there remain a number of challenges both to the vocational education and training sector and to the occupational sectors with which this project is concerned. In terms of the latter, the challenges can be summarised as follows.

Building crafts/construction – issues relating to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners/providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currency of Level 2 qualifications • Low retention rate of apprenticeships • Lack of employer engagement in training and assessment • Oversubscription of courses • Lack of capacity and insufficient workshop facilities • Quality of courses needs to improve • Lack of investment in training in modern methods of construction • Lack of CoVE awareness by employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal entry routes • Poorly-qualified workforce • Lack of supply of suitably qualified/skilled entrants • Women and minority ethnic groups under-represented • Lack of employer investment in training opportunities • Lack of employer-led apprenticeships • Dominance of small businesses

Hospitality – issues relating to:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learners/providers	Currency of Level 2 qualifications Increase in recruitment at Level 2 rather than Level 3 Stagnant achievement rates at Level 3 Poor retention on long courses Lack of CoVE awareness by employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The industry	Low barriers to entry Lower than average salary levels Majority of workers are women and minority ethnic groups are well represented Majority of workers occupy basic-level jobs Workforce is poorly-qualified/skilled Shortages of staff and high turnover rates

These issues and others will be tested out in the following sections that look at:

- data on participation and achievement in CoVEs
- the interviews undertaken with CoVEs, partner organisations and employers, and the focus groups with learners.

3.2 Data analysis

Section summary

The data upon which the analysis is based have a number of caveats. The conclusions that have been drawn, therefore, must be considered in this light.

Since 2002/03, London enrolments on to Level 2 courses in building crafts CoVEs have increased more than threefold; those at Level 3 have increased by 51%. All three CoVEs have experienced increased numbers at Level 3 over the three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05).

Since 2002/03, enrolments on to Level 2 courses have increased in two London-based hospitality CoVEs but have decreased in the other two. At Level 3, two CoVEs have seen an increase in enrolments, and fluctuations have occurred in the other two. Over the three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05), enrolments at Level 3 have increased by 18%.

In 2004/05, 60% of learners enrolling on to construction courses were white. In hospitality, 64% were white.

The number of women on construction courses has more than doubled since 2002/03, although the proportion decreased by 1% to 17% in 2004/05. The number of women on hospitality courses has decreased from 56% in 2002/03 to 48% in 2004/05.

This analysis is in two parts. The first is an analysis of CoVE learner enrolments and achievements over a three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05) for Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. These data were supplied by the CoVEs involved in this project. The second analysis is of learners' social characteristics – their age, ethnicity and gender – over a three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05), derived from the ILR. There are a number of caveats to these data, which are presented under each section.

3.2.1 Enrolments and achievements

Data were provided by all the CoVEs except for two in building crafts. Thus, the analysis for building crafts is based on three CoVEs instead of five. It should also be noted that a number of the building crafts CoVEs included data about learners enrolled on courses other than building crafts (eg plumbing, heating and ventilation, electrical installation); these have been excluded from this analysis. It also excludes data on work-based learners because these were only presented by one CoVE. In addition, two CoVEs (one in building crafts and one in hospitality) did not provide the data in the format requested and, therefore, the analysis below may not accurately reflect the picture in these particular CoVEs.

Table 2. Building crafts enrolments

	Level 2			Level 3		
	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
CoVE A	183	124	134	87	124	118
CoVE B	23	87	738	22	17	51
CoVE C	109	119	141	27	36	36

At Level 2, two CoVEs have experienced an increase in enrolments since 2002/03 (one substantially). In total, enrolments have increased more than threefold over the three-year period.

At Level 3, all three CoVEs have seen increased enrolments over the three-year period. Overall, there has been a 51% increase.

Table 3. Building crafts achievements

	Level 2			Level 3		
	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
CoVE A	60 (33%)	48 (39%)	65 (49%)	32 (37%)	73 (59%)	73 (62%)
CoVE B	11 (48%)	47 (54%)	551 (75%)	19 (86%)	14 (82%)	43 (84%)
CoVE C	95 (87%)	87 (73%)	112 (79%)	22 (81%)	29 (81%)	30 (83%)

Since 2002/03, and along with the increase in enrolments, there has been an increase in the numbers of learners achieving Level 2 qualifications. However, achievement rates vary between the CoVEs and over the three-year period. Two CoVEs have seen a year-on-year improvement in achievement rates.

At Level 3, numbers achieving a qualification have increased; achievement rates have remained relatively stable in two CoVEs, while the third has seen a year-on-year improvement.

Table 4. Hospitality enrolments

	Level 2			Level 3		
	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
CoVE D	1116	904	842	183	214	157
CoVE E	189	278	344	54	89	114
CoVE F	80	93	208	No data	18	20
CoVE G	796	229	173	60	41	58

In two CoVEs, enrolments have increased at Level 2 over the three years. Two have seen reductions at this level, one substantially. This has adversely impacted on enrolment numbers overall, which have decreased by around 30% over the three-year period.

At Level 3, two CoVEs have seen an increase in enrolments (one very modestly), while in a third enrolments have fluctuated. In the fourth (CoVE D), numbers have fluctuated due to a campus move and changes to staged learning. However, overall enrolments at this level have increased by 18% over the three years.

Table 5. Hospitality achievements

	Level 2			Level 3		
	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
CoVE D	892 (80%)	679 (75%)	661 (79%)	127 (69%)	146 (68%)	102 (65%)
CoVE E	147 (78%)	196 (71%)	252 (73%)	42 (78%)	54 (61%)	91 (80%)
CoVE F	53 (66%)	64 (69%)	152 (73%)	No data	9 (50%)	10 (50%)
CoVE G	373 (47%)	137 (60%)	136 (79%)	24 (40%)	24 (59%)	33 (57%)

Numbers achieving a Level 2 qualification have increased over the three years in two CoVEs. Of the remaining two, numbers have declined, reflecting the decline in enrolments. Achievement rates in two CoVEs show a year-on-year improvement.

At Level 3, three CoVEs have shown increases in the number of learner achievements (one modestly). Achievement rates in three CoVEs have fluctuated and remained stable in the fourth.

3.2.2 Learners' social characteristics

The data presented below is derived from the ILR, and includes all CoVEs involved in this project. It should be noted that data for the construction area include data on learners *in addition* to those on building crafts courses (and in many cases these 'other courses' will form a large proportion of the data). In addition, the data do not include work-based learners.

Table 6. Age of construction learners on enrolment

Age	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Under 16	221	231	357
16-18	899	1884	2334
19-20	288	595	715
21-24	412	875	1115
25-59	1967	4259	4962
60 and over	49	88	108
Total	3836	7932	9591

Over the three years, enrolments have more than doubled in construction CoVEs, in London, and numbers in all age groups have increased year-on-year. The biggest increase has been in the 21-24 age group, followed by the 16-18 age group. However, in 2004/05 the 25-59 age group represented just over half of all enrolments, a pattern that has remained relatively stable since 2002/03.

Table 7. Ethnic background of construction learners

Ethnicity	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Asian or Asian British	235	571	709
Black or black British	916	1883	2184
Chinese	12	51	61
Mixed background	125	389	547
White	1195	4025	5274
Other	207	397	474
Not known/not provided	1146	616	342
Total	3836	7932	9591

There has been a steady increase in the numbers of learners from all ethnic backgrounds in construction over the three-year period. Excluding the 'other' and 'not known/not provided' categories, white learners represented 60% of all enrolments in 2004/05; those of black or black British background made up 25% of the total.

In 2002/03 the pattern was different, when white learners represented 48% of the learner body; however, figures for 2002/03 are skewed by the fact that the 'not known/not provided' category is over three times the figure reported in 2004/05.

Table 8. Gender of construction learners

Gender	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Female	689	1585	1596
Male	3147	6347	7995
Total	3836	7932	9591

Numbers of female learners in construction have increased over the three years, but so have males. Over the three-year period, the number of women has more than doubled, but the increase in the number of men has been greater. Thus, in 2002/03, women accounted for 18% of the learner body; in 2004/05 it was 17%.

Table 9. Age of hospitality learners on enrolment

Age	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Under 16	32	62	57
16-18	673	720	1036
19-20	190	160	282
21-24	349	335	412
25-59	2413	1857	1700
60 and over	96	39	37
Missing age	24	0	1
Total	3777	3173	3525

Unlike construction, hospitality numbers have shown an overall decline since 2002/03.

Enrolments in most age groups have increased, the main exception being the 25-59 age group which has seen a 30% drop since 2002/03. In 2004/05, this age group represented almost half of hospitality enrolments; in 2002/03 it was 64%.

Table 10. Ethnic background of hospitality learners

Ethnicity	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Asian or Asian British	144	157	208
Black or black British	387	622	630
Chinese	49	61	77
Mixed background	44	107	141
White	1041	1310	1838
Other	175	127	184
Not known/not provided	1937	789	447
Total	3777	3173	3525

As with construction, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of learners from all ethnic backgrounds in hospitality over the three-year period. Excluding the 'other' and 'not known/not provided' categories, white learners represented 64% of all enrolments in 2004/05; those of black or black British background made up 22% of the total.

The pattern in 2002/03 was similar – 63% and 23% respectively; however, figures for 2002/03 are skewed given that the 'not known/not provided' category is over four times the one reported in 2004/05.

Table 11. Gender of hospitality learners

Gender	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Female	2109	1464	1682
Male	1668	1709	1843
Total	3777	3173	3525

The number of males enrolling on hospitality courses shows a steady year-on-year increase over the three-year period (a 10% increase). Female numbers, however, have declined since 2002/03 (by 20%), a year when women were in the majority. In 2004/05, women accounted for 48% of hospitality enrolments, compared with 56% in 2002/03. Overall, the number of males has grown by 10% and the number of females has fallen by 20% over the three years.

3.3 Interviews

Section summary

Building crafts

For most London CoVEs demand is high for Level 2 courses, less so for Level 3. Level 2 qualifications have currency in the construction industry, and there is lack of employer support for training after Level 2. Demand for courses tends to be a mixture of employer and learner demand.

For some CoVEs, CoVE status has not made a difference, although for others it has helped to brand courses, get the college known and attract better-qualified staff.

The main barriers to progression for learners include the currency of Level 2 qualifications and employers' unwillingness to release trainees beyond Level 2.

The majority of CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers.

CoVEs have developed extensive networks for disseminating good practice and knowledge externally – within the CoVE network, with non-CoVE providers, through teaching staff networks, employers' forums and specialist development groups. Dissemination within the host colleges (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less well established. The LSC's new Agenda for Change quality standard should be used to provide best practice guidelines to address this.

CoVE employers and partner organisations offered a range of views about current provision and progression opportunities for learners. These included the currency of Level 2 qualifications within the industry, lack of funding opportunities, the relevance of some provision to the industry or availability of provision and difficulties in placing employed apprentices on courses. This final point appears to be a London-specific problem.

There is some support for higher-level skills training for better-qualified managerial staff and project managers, and in relation to new building materials and technologies.

CoVEs are working hard to improve the representation of women on CoVE courses and in the construction industry. Much outreach work is being done to encourage a more diverse learner population. However, funding is seen as a barrier, especially for older workers, women returners and the unemployed. Learners with disabilities are encouraged, but there are concerns about health and safety regarding working on-site.

CoVE engagement with employers is extensive, and relationships with the SSC are good. However, employers do not appear to be involved in setting the curriculum, and in teaching and assessment; many would not welcome such involvement, although some would.

Views about the impact on employment and skills needs of the 2012 Olympic Games, to be held in London, are tentative. There is a lack of clarity regarding the architecture and building materials that will be used; if modern methods and materials are to be used, CoVEs are unlikely to be able to respond. As for labour and skills shortages, the general view among interviewees is that much will be filled by foreign workers, and the pressure created by the need to build the Olympic Games' infrastructure within a set timescale will exacerbate labour and skills shortages elsewhere in the industry.

Hospitality

In London, two CoVEs have high levels of demand for all of their courses, while the other two are oversubscribed at Level 2. Demand for courses tends to be a mixture of employer and learner demand.

There is a lack of demand from the industry for Level 3 qualifications; Level 2 qualifications have currency, and this is the main barrier to progression. This view was endorsed by CoVE employers and partner organisations, but other barriers also include the lack of funding opportunities, employers' reluctance to release staff beyond Level 2 and scepticism about the relevance of NVQs.

CoVE employers and partner organisations commented on the need for higher-level skills training, specifically to develop management, supervisory and communications skills.

Most CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers.

External dissemination of knowledge and good practice is well established and undertaken in a number of ways: through CoVE partnerships, regional and national CoVE networks, employers' forums and professional associations, and by working with non-CoVE providers. Dissemination within the host colleges (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less well established.

In general, CoVEs are seen as important factors in helping to address the needs of the industry.

In terms of widening participation to learning, some CoVEs have difficulty recruiting young, white males. Learners with disabilities are encouraged but there are concerns about health and safety with regard to working in a kitchen environment. Much outreach work is being done with schools and parents to encourage a more diverse learner population.

Employer involvement with CoVEs is extensive. Most employers and partner organisations are satisfied with their CoVE involvement. Involvement between the majority of CoVEs and the SSC is limited. Opportunities to develop relationships between the SSC and CoVEs need to be explored further.

Views about the likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games are mixed and wide ranging: labour and skills shortages will be exacerbated, shortages will be covered by foreign labour and most training requirements will be at Level 2 although there may be a demand for Level 3 qualifications due to the shortage of workers with supervisory skills.

The following interviews were undertaken (further information can be found in Appendices 2, 3 and 4).

Table 12. Interviews undertaken

Interviews	Building crafts	Hospitality
CoVEs	5	4
Employers	7	7
Partner organisations	4	4
SSCs	1	1
LDA	1	1

Interviews were semi-structured, and a series of questions were identified under the themes of the project:

- current vocational pathways/progression opportunities – nature of the provision and demand; the needs of the industry and gaps in provision; the impact of CoVE status; learner progression and barriers to progression; employer, demand-led courses; dissemination of good practice/knowledge
- widening participation – initiatives employed and their effectiveness; barriers to participation
- external relationships – nature and extent of employer engagement; SSC involvement; other collaborative arrangements; barriers to engagement
- skills shortages and the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games.

Learner focus groups in each CoVE were undertaken, and covered a different set of issues; these are dealt with in section 3.4.

The analysis of the interviews (below) is structured around the four main areas outlined above. All interviewees addressed the themes to a greater or lesser extent; for example, on issues regarding widening participation, a number of employers and partner organisations did not feel they had an adequate knowledge base from which to form any opinions; some of the interviews inevitably were constrained by interviewees' time commitments. It should also be noted that the types of employers and partner organisations (which were all identified by the CoVEs themselves) represented a very mixed group. For example, in building crafts, employers and organisations represented a number of the 'sub-sectors' of the industry. This mix brought a wide range of views on a number of issues, but also some similarities, as the discussion below will reveal.

3.3.1 Current vocational pathways/progression opportunities

Building crafts

In interviews with representatives of the **CoVEs**, it was ascertained that all the CoVEs involved in the project provide courses at all levels (that is, Levels 1 to 3; one CoVE mentioned that it provided courses at Level 4), and all courses lead to progression and/or into employment. Four of the five CoVEs stated that demand at Level 2 is high, but it is less so at Level 3. The other CoVE stated that while demand is high at all levels, courses at Levels 3 and 4 are oversubscribed. This is supported by the data analysis in section 3.2, which shows that most demand in most CoVEs is at Level 2, although it should be noted that the data cover the whole construction area, and only data for three of the five CoVEs are presented.

Four of the five CoVEs felt that the demand for courses was a mixture of both learner and employer demand, but this was something that was not easy to pinpoint exactly; the other CoVE felt it was more a case of learner demand.

Since gaining CoVE status, three organisations felt that demand had either improved or increased significantly (although one felt it was difficult to attribute the increase to CoVE status, and another that it was more to do with the buoyancy of the construction industry). Of the remaining two, one felt there had been no significant increase (there had always been a high demand for its courses despite CoVE status) and the other, having been awarded CoVE status earlier in the year, had not seen any 'immediate increase'. However, this latter CoVE had been approached by some organisations and employers, including one women's organisation. The CoVE is now working with this organisation to recruit more women on to its courses.

In some cases, CoVE status had made a difference. Two CoVEs felt the 'badge of excellence' had helped to brand their courses and make them better known (eg with managing agents, employers) and another referred to the ability to attract better-qualified staff, given the additional resources CoVE status brought with it.

In terms of gaps in provision, three of the CoVEs felt there were no gaps – all areas were covered, although one mentioned the need for additional funding to meet the demand for courses. Another wished it could improve its provision to meet the new and rapidly changing building technology (eg glass, steel), while another mentioned that it was already moving into new areas such as conservation, and certification of plant operators on-site.

Most of the CoVEs mentioned that the biggest demand for courses was at Level 2. One CoVE highlighted the currency of Level 2 qualifications within the industry and a lack of employer support for further training after this level (see below regarding barriers to progression). Another stated that the college actively encourages its learners to progress, and two highlighted the lack of resources and physical space in which to expand to take on more trainees. Of these latter two, one had introduced a strict admissions policy and gave priority to trainees already in the industry, because of the demand for courses at Levels 3 and 4. Another CoVE highlighted the different 'types' of learners it accepts at the different levels: at Level 2, learners are more likely to be unemployed, whereas at Level 3, learners tend to be returners who have been in employment. This CoVE does not encourage full-time study at these levels, because work experience in the industry is essential.

In the context of the importance of work experience, one CoVE interviewee drew attention to Construction Awards. These awards, along with NVQs, are offered by CoVEs (both are awarded by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)). Construction Awards provide an alternative qualification where a learner is unable to find an apprenticeship, or if an employer is unwilling to bear the cost of taking on an apprentice. As the interviewee explained, in terms of academic and technical study, both programmes lead to a technical certificate, and the curriculum is the same. The difference is whether learners can produce the evidence of experience (portfolio) and, under the current NVQ scheme, learners have to be in employment to produce a portfolio. As noted in the literature review, because the industry is mainly structured around small sub-contracting companies, these companies are often unwilling to take on apprentices, so many learners do not have the opportunity to work in the industry and therefore cannot take NVQs. In addition, even when learners are in employment, there are occasions when they cannot produce the portfolio required by the NVQ (eg because of the constricted nature of the work experience provided by an employer or because of lack of employer support). This interviewee commented that in the long term, if learners want to work in the

industry, it is better to qualify with NVQs. However, the experience of this CoVE is that Construction Awards do have currency in the industry, and learners will often gain employment subsequently.

One of the main barriers to progression from Level 2 to Level 3, mentioned by three CoVEs, is that most learners who qualify at Level 2 get employment, and therefore there is no reason to stay on for a Level 3 qualification. For example, one CoVE had no Level 3 courses in bricklaying. The reason given was the sub-contractual nature of the industry and the lack of interest in training. It was perceived that 'it was difficult to get people to train in the first place'.

Of the major issues mentioned in the interviews regarding barriers to progression, these can be summed up as follows:

- the currency of Level 2 qualifications in the industry
- the lack of interest from employers in training and qualifications
- the reluctance of employers to release trainees for Level 3 training once they have gained a Level 2 qualification
- the unwillingness of employers to fund Level 3 courses.

These barriers reflect many of those identified by the literature review. One CoVE interviewee, however, noted an additional point: that Level 3 qualifications are not 'more craft'; they tend to focus more on supervisory skills. Thus, a Level 2 qualifier would need to consolidate experience on-site before considering a Level 3 supervisory qualification. Therefore, many trainees may return at a later stage to gain a Level 3 qualification rather than progress to this level immediately from Level 2. Other issues mentioned in the interviews were those of funding, with the focus now being on the 16–18-year-old age group.⁴

In terms of progression opportunities, two CoVEs pointed out that there are no barriers imposed by the college or the curriculum. Another CoVE highlighted the tension between the need for mathematical ability at Level 3, the low levels of literacy and numeracy within the college's geographical location and the lack of focus on key skills by schools in the area. To deal with the issue of the lack of key skills, one CoVE had key skills coordinators based in the department. Formerly, these coordinators had been college-based, not department-based, and since the change there was a better understanding among both students and staff of the relevance of key skills.

Four of the five CoVEs said they were involved in offering short, bespoke, industry-focused courses to employers to varying extents. The other CoVE had not been asked to provide anything tailor-made as yet. Of those courses that are provided, all tend to be funded by the employers. The main barriers to providing this type of service, and mentioned in the interviews, were arranging the time, and capacity issues. However, two CoVEs felt that there were no barriers to providing these types of courses because staff at the college were willing to be flexible by working evenings and at weekends, and running the courses either at the college or at the employer's location. For example, a couple of CoVEs had been asked by their local authorities to arrange specific courses for their employees, which were fully funded by these employers.

⁴ Since these interviews were undertaken, the 2006 White Paper has signalled a new entitlement to free tuition for 19–25 year olds who are studying for their first Level 3 qualification, which will be funded in full (DfES 2006, p10).

In terms of disseminating good practice and knowledge outside the CoVEs, interviewees mentioned a number of initiatives (either CoVE or externally organised) that existed. They included:

- CoVE meetings (regional and national)
- contacts with certain other CoVEs
- contacts with non-CoVEs (including visits by other providers to view CoVE workshop facilities)
- teaching staff networks (eg the Guild of Bricklayers)
- pan-London Building One-Stop Shop
- Women into Construction network
- specialist development group meetings and other regional events.

As far as the dissemination of good practice and knowledge *within* the colleges was concerned, two CoVEs mentioned the processes employed in their colleges. Examples provided were weekly staff meetings and fortnightly management meetings, which enable information to be shared. One CoVE referred to the training sessions it runs for all college staff to spread the benefits of CoVE status across the college; these have included the use of interactive whiteboards and virtual learning environment (VLE) systems, and how to engage employers.

Interviews with the '**partner organisations**', as identified by the CoVEs themselves, and with the SSC (CITB-ConstructionSkills) and the LDA raised similar issues to those of the CoVEs. In terms of the skills needed by the London construction industry and whether or not these are being met, the following views were made.

- There is a lack of skilled people working in the industry; many are working without formal qualifications and, compared with the rest of the country, London lacks workers qualified to Level 2 and Level 3.
- Only 40% of recruits to the industry are qualified; OSAT⁵ aims to pick up those not qualified.
- The main areas where there is a need for more skills are customer care, logistics, modern methods of construction, repair and maintenance. More qualified managerial staff are needed, and there is a need for more basic and language skills training.

Of the problems in meeting these needs, the following were mentioned, which again echo many of those identified by the literature review.

- The curriculum is not responsive to employers' needs. Some NVQs are not right for the industry, some are not necessary and some are too long.
- Many employers/employees do not recognise the relevance and importance of Level 3 qualifications.
- FE funding is too focused on the full-time trainee, which means that the employed apprentice is hard to place – this seems to be a London-specific problem.
- Funding is limited and too little for 19+ years; there is more funding for full-timers than there is for part-timers and the unemployed.
- The self-employed nature of the industry militates against a training culture.
- Labour in the construction industry is traditionally migrant, and much of it comes from central and eastern European countries. While this helps to solve immediate

⁵ Through OSAT, assessors can visit workers on-site to assess the skills they have and develop an action plan to fill any gaps. It has been developed as a fast-track route to a vocational qualification and means that workers do not have to leave their place of work.

needs, it is not sustainable, because migrant labour will eventually move elsewhere; therefore, there is a need to upskill the local labour force.

In terms of issues around progression from Level 2 to Level 3, again similar points raised by the CoVEs were also made by the partner organisations. One partner organisation felt that there was a lack of progression opportunities because the gap between Level 2 and Level 3 is 'too big'. Another felt that the major barriers are that Level 2 is seen as sufficient, and funding opportunities are not in place to encourage further training – it was suggested that perhaps there needs to be more on-site training. As far as higher-level skills are concerned, it was felt that these were needed in relation to new building materials and technology, and to cater for the demand for project managers. One partner organisation felt that it was not clear what opportunities are available, and better marketing of courses and funding is required.

When asked whether CoVEs are important in addressing the needs of the industry, a variety of views were expressed. One interviewee was of the view that CoVE status is important because it means the quality of provision is good. Another echoed this view and felt that CoVEs are proactive, and good at identifying needs; however, this interviewee also felt that the differences between CoVEs were enormous. This latter point was taken up by another interviewee who felt that some CoVEs deserved their status more than others and that some non-CoVEs and private training providers 'can do a better job'. Other views included the observation that while CoVEs were undoubtedly important in addressing the needs of the industry, their distribution is uneven across London. Another organisation was concerned about the lack of local people working on the big London projects; this interviewee was of the opinion that colleges have been very insular traditionally, and CoVEs needed to be more involved with industry to understand its needs better.

In **employer** interviews, a variety of views were expressed about the needs of the construction industry. One employer felt that 'his' CoVE did not provide progression opportunities to Higher National Certificates and undergraduate levels, and another knew only of one provider that offered the relevant NVQ in his particular sector of the industry. Another felt there was a shortage of managers qualified at Level 3+ and that better provision was needed at these levels; but, it was also pointed out that the lack of progression from Level 2 to Level 3 was due to the absence of a clear progression route from the craft skills (Level 2) to management/supervisory skills (Level 3+). Another employer stated that it is rare for workers with a trade background to move to the 'higher levels', and another that higher-level qualifications were not required by the industry. In general terms, two employers felt that most needs were being met by the colleges, and what is not can be met by private training providers. These two employers stated that they tend to work only with colleges with CoVE status.

Some employers expressed needs specific to their businesses; for example, one felt that there is a shortage of estimators, but recognised that this is not an area that colleges specialise in. Another employer felt that recruits to the industry (in this case, gas engineering) needed to have a minimum qualification at NVQ Level 2. This particular employer preferred recruits to have Level 3 qualifications and stated that he would be willing to allow training to Level 3.

As far as gaps in provision were concerned, one employer felt these existed at the basic levels, and that there were too many unnecessary and out-of-date courses. Another employer pointed to the poor state of apprenticeship training, which he felt was due to funding arrangements, employers not engaging and training providers not listening to employers' needs. Two employers were concerned with the gap in provision for older employees: one felt there was a need for shorter and more focused courses, while

another felt that colleges should provide courses that can be taken by senior people already in the industry who do not have recognised qualifications (eg the Chartered Institute of Building's Direct Membership examination). Two employers felt that there was a gap in the provision of courses for people with learning difficulties. Another felt that college courses are not always what the industry requires: for example in plastering, the focus is on wet plaster, but the London industry requires dry-lining. It was also mentioned that it would be useful to have specific qualifications for on-site building workers who are fitting kitchens and bathrooms, in addition to the traditional building crafts qualifications.

In terms of working with CoVEs, employers highlighted a number of positive and negative features. Of the positive ones, the following statements were made by different employers.

- The CoVE is more approachable, flexible and professional than other providers.
- CoVEs are 'more on the ball', have better administration and are better at marketing themselves. Their trainees tend to be more positive than those of other providers.
- Working with CoVEs has been good in terms of delivering quality.
- The college offers a better service than others in terms of communications; CoVEs are good at providing reports on trainees' progress.
- The college is good at working with local employers.

Of the negative features, the following were mentioned.

- CoVEs do not always provide the best-quality provision.
- CoVEs could be more important, but funding drives them.
- The college is not good at promoting its CoVE status in terms of progression opportunities.
- The college is not very good at reporting on how well the apprentices are doing at college (or even whether they attend).

On this latter point, one employer felt that once the firm takes on the college's learners as apprentices, the college's involvement with the employer seems to finish. Another employer was disappointed to find out that it had not been informed that its apprentices had been given the 'best apprentices' award by the college.

Two employers stated that they work with other providers because of location. Two others felt that CoVE status was not necessarily that important; what is important is whether they offer the courses that are needed by the industry – 'you tend to know the college rather than the fact that it is a "CoVE" college'.

Hospitality

Interviews with the four hospitality **CoVEs** confirmed that they felt all their courses fed into progression. Two currently had no Level 4 provision; one was planning to develop provision at this level, while the other also intended to do so as a means of helping to recruit to Level 3.

To encourage progression, one CoVE had developed more intensive but shorter courses, so that the learners were more motivated to achieve their qualifications. The courses involved NVQ Levels 1 and 2. The learners complete NVQ Level 1 in 15 weeks (30 hours a week), in which they have a one-week placement. In the second semester, learners are required to work in the industry two days a week and take NVQ Level 2 modules. By the

end of the academic year, they complete NVQ Level 2 modules followed by a three-month placement. In the last year of its operation, there had been a 100% retention rate.

Another CoVE was working with the Springboard Trust to access school pupils aged 14–16 years. Some were already enrolled in the CoVE for a Saturday course. If successful and willing to continue, many learners are offered places on the diploma courses once they gain five GCSEs (grades C and above). From there it is relatively easy for learners to progress from Level 2 to Level 3 and even to the foundation degree.

In terms of demand, two CoVEs stated that it was very high at all levels and on all courses, and one stated that demand at Level 3 had grown significantly, mainly due to the attractiveness of the placements that the college can offer. Two CoVEs stated that the demand at Level 2 was oversubscribed. One CoVE was having difficulty, so far, in meeting its Level 3 targets; the reasons for this were felt to be in terms of the catchment area rather than a marketing issue. This particular CoVE was oversubscribed on its Level 1 and 2 courses, and it was felt that this high demand was due to the lack of provision in schools in the area.

The data analysis in section 3.2 shows that demand at Level 2 is high, although one CoVE has seen a substantial decrease in enrolments at this level over a three-year period. It should be noted, however, that data for the four CoVEs are incomplete, and therefore firm conclusions are difficult to draw.

Three of the four CoVEs felt that the demand for their courses was due to both employer-led and student-led demand. The fourth felt it had initially been learner-led, but now, because of its CoVE status, employers were asking for training. In terms of CoVE status, one felt that it had had an effect on the demand for courses because the increased marketing capability had increased its profile. Another felt that the status had just consolidated, and confirmed what was already there; the college learning experience rather than CoVE status was more important to this particular CoVE because it felt not all colleges were the same.

Two of the CoVEs felt that there were no gaps in the provision they offered – one because it provided a comprehensive course structure and a wide range of qualifications, and the other because it felt it was delivering what the industry wanted. Another CoVE had identified the need and opportunity for converting employer in-house training into approved units; this CoVE was also planning to develop a foundation degree. The fourth CoVE felt that as far as gaps were concerned, NVQs did not fit in with its vision of good educational provision – courses should be ‘based on performance, not ticking off competencies’. Another mentioned its work with the Springboard Trust in identifying courses relevant for school pupils.

Despite the growth in demand for Level 3 courses at some of the CoVEs, all four felt that the industry has no great demand for Level 3 qualifications because Level 2 qualifications have currency and, therefore, this was a barrier to progression. One CoVE interviewee expressed it in this way: ‘It is a highly pressurised industry, so employers are very often reluctant to release beyond Level 2. At Level 2 they have a qualified, competent worker, so the need to release further is often regarded as unnecessary.’ However, as mentioned above, one CoVE felt that by introducing attractive placements, Level 3 demand had increased. Other barriers experienced by learners that were mentioned by the CoVEs included a lack of basic skills, geographical location and travel and financial issues. The general perception of the CoVEs that Level 2 qualifications have currency within the industry reflects one of the main outcomes of the literature review.

Three of the four CoVEs were involved in providing bespoke, industry-focused courses. One CoVE indicated that these courses had initially been subsidised through CoVE funding, but now employers were more willing to contribute. Thus, it felt the activity was sustainable, although the return on investment was not huge. Another indicated that because employers are often unwilling to pay, 'LSC funding is drawn down', although the summer schools it runs are fully funded by employers. As far as barriers in this context were concerned, funding and space were mentioned by one of the CoVEs. The other two felt there were no barriers, as they were flexible enough to meet the needs of employers in terms of times and location.

As with the building crafts CoVEs, the question about how knowledge and good practice were transferred to other providers elicited a wide range of initiatives as follows:

- within the CoVE partnership and through a number of forums
- regional/national CoVE networks
- contacts with non-CoVEs
- employers' forums
- work with the Springboard Trust
- through the Professional Association for Catering Education
- staff exchanges between providers.

With regard to 'internal' dissemination of good practice and knowledge, one CoVE recognised that theoretically it should happen, but in practice it did not; information tended to remain within the department. Another CoVE mentioned staff development days both within the department and across the college.

Interviews with the '**partner organisations**', as identified by the CoVEs themselves, and with the SSC (People 1st) and the LDA raised similar issues to those raised by the CoVEs.

A number of interviewees indicated that there was a dearth of qualified and skilled people at all levels, and indeed one interviewee questioned why the emphasis was placed on Level 3 qualifications and skills. Another interviewee pointed out that the industry caters for people of different skills ability, and if a potential recruit has the necessary people skills, he/she can be trained up to the industry-specific skills. It was noted that the majority of jobs are at Levels 1 and 2. Once someone is qualified at Level 2, they need to become competent and experienced at that level before they progress; a higher-level qualification is not necessarily one that is needed in the industry. However, many interviewees pointed to the lack of skilled and qualified personnel in the following areas: chefs, customer service, housekeeping, front of house, management, business awareness, menu planning and awareness of environmental health issues.

One interviewee pointed to the 'vicious circle of recruitment and retention': once people are trained they do not stay in the job, therefore employers are reluctant to support training. Another interviewee, while accepting that there is a huge turnover of staff, felt that this was desirable because it enabled people to gain experience and variety – 'people might leave an organisation, but they stay in the industry'.

Others identified problems in relation to meeting the needs of the industry.

- There is a lack of WBL opportunities in hospitality in London; there is a need for more CoVEs.
- What is needed are short, focused courses.
- The industry is responsible for ensuring that needs are met. Young people tend to be employed, then trained on the job; they may not get a good-quality training experience.

- The industry's image needs to be promoted.
- There is a need for better careers advice in schools and more targeted government funding.

Discussions around progression issues and the barriers faced by learners moving from Level 2 to Level 3 tended to reflect issues similar to those highlighted by the literature review and some of those raised in the building crafts interviews. The issues included the following.

- Level 3+ tends to be under-subscribed.
- There is a big leap in knowledge and skill requirements from Level 2 to Level 3, which is difficult to meet without work experience.
- A few years' full-time work experience may be required between levels.
- Funding is a barrier to progression depending on the level of qualification and age of the trainee. Levels 1 and 2 are funded for 14–19 year olds, but the hospitality market is 19+; there is little funding for Levels 2 and 3.
- Employers are reluctant to fund provision beyond Level 2.

Three interviewees highlighted issues around the NVQ system.

- NVQs are not necessarily what employers and the industry wants.
- There are too many qualifications, which confuses employers. Are NVQs the best answer – they lack insight into the industry, and many lecturers have never worked in the industry themselves.
- NVQs do not meet skills needs, and are a barrier to progression; all they do is prove that a person can do something, but that person does not necessarily have the accompanying knowledge and understanding.

It was also mentioned that clearer career pathways were needed for those who wish to progress in their career; for example, 'if a young person has an ambition to become a sous-chef, he/she needs to know what training and qualifications are required to enable him/her to do so'. Another interviewee was of the view that school leavers and learners often regard hospitality as a low-level job and working in it would not be a long-term option. Other barriers mentioned were learners' lack of enthusiasm, and the realisation that Level 2 is sufficient.

In discussions with interviewees about higher-level skills, there was a consensus that there is a need for people in certain jobs to be qualified at Level 3 and above because Level 2 is often inadequate. The main areas mentioned were management, supervisory and communication skills and training. However, as mentioned above, there are problems regarding the demand for qualifications at Level 3 and above because learners do not want to do further training, employers are reluctant to fund and release trainees, and Level 2 is regarded as sufficient (but only because of labour shortages – as pointed out by one interviewee). As another interviewee highlighted, the problem lies with the industry; there is a need for awareness raising, and a change of attitude and culture within the industry in order to realise that better managers are needed. Another partner organisation commented that the industry is good at promoting staff internally, but is not so good at supporting staff in the acquisition of the skills required for these higher-level jobs. Another highlighted the need to make employers see that investment in the training of individuals in higher-level skills will benefit the business in the long run.

It is clear from discussions with the LDA that actions are being taken to address many of these issues raised by the partner organisations. The LDA has set out an action plan for the HLTT industry across London. The plan aims to address the challenges experienced by the industry: staff shortages, high turnover rates and insufficiently qualified and skilled

staff. As part of the plan, a number of themes were identified against which interested organisations could tender to lead a theme or deliver a specific service. As a result of this tendering process, over a three-year period (April 2005–March 2008), the LDA has funded 18 projects under four themes, which aim to significantly benefit the HLTT industry. The four themes cover: recruiting people, retaining key staff, engaging employers and building the skills base through training. Two of the funded projects in the latter theme are in hospitality CoVEs concerned with this project.

CoVEs were seen as very important by partner organisations in addressing the needs of the industry, and mention was made of the excellent facilities they have and the good-quality provision that is on offer. In many cases, however, interviewees qualified these comments. A number mentioned the issue of funding, and one was concerned that, because colleges have to be financially driven, there may be a temptation to relax admissions policies that could drive standards down. Another felt that some CoVEs needed to widen their employer net, not be so reliant on the same employers, and include SMEs. It was also suggested that college teaching staff could benefit from more recent work experience in the industry by spending at least two weeks of the year in an organisation.

As far as **employers** were concerned, the types of people needed in their businesses and/or by the industry are not necessarily those with qualifications. As one employer put it: 'Qualifications are not crucial but skilled employees are.' However, views differed. On the one hand, some felt that the skills learners possessed were not important because the employer will take on the role of trainer. On the other hand, two employers felt that they wanted people with experience, basic skills and qualifications up to Level 2. In terms of shortages, a majority of the employers interviewed mentioned the lack of 'qualified', 'skilled' and 'well-trained' chefs.

The majority of employers felt that the industry's needs were not being met, and a range of reasons were provided.

- Employers and providers need to work more closely.
- Jobs are seen as low status; this problem could be addressed by a better-informed school careers service, which does not assume that a career in hospitality is for low-ability pupils.
- Punctuality is something that is very important in the industry; this is not being instilled into learners, because they are allowed to turn up late for class.
- While trainees will often be qualified to Level 2, because they have studied full time, they do not have realistic views of the job.
- The 'youth of today' are unprepared for the outside world, but if they can survive a year in the industry, they will probably remain.

In addition, and as with some of the partner organisations, a majority of employers were critical of the NVQ and apprenticeship system. One employer felt that the vocational education and training opportunities were too complex. Another found the qualifications framework confusing; another that not all courses were relevant to the needs of the industry; and two that the whole qualifications system needed to be modernised. Another employer felt that NVQs were not as rigorous as the qualifications they had replaced: 'They are too simple, too diverse and therefore it is easier to train people yourself.' Two employers felt that the old-fashioned block-release apprentice system had been better: 'The day-release system is too disruptive and the real work experience is not appropriate – a college is not a business.'

As far as higher-level skills were concerned, the general consensus was that there is a need, especially in the area of soft skills training – management, customer service, good

communication, discipline and general people skills. It was felt that these needs were not being met, and reasons given included the negative reputation of the industry, the need to overhaul the qualifications framework and funding system, the need for companies to provide incentives to their staff for training and the fact that the workforce is transient which, it was pointed out, is not necessarily a bad thing, as people need to gain experience.

With regard to the CoVEs, the majority of interviewees were of the opinion that they are very important. Comments included the following.

- They are excellent at providing short courses for employer-specific needs.
- They are good at providing general qualifications, training and industry-standard courses.
- We only work with this particular CoVE and its partner because of the reputation.
- CoVEs are regarded as beacons of excellence; they can be inspirational in their training approach; it's good for the industry to have a coordinated system of vocational education and training.
- The experience of working with CoVEs has been excellent – they have a 'can do' attitude, are flexible, engage with employers, and are motivational and inspirational.
- We do not use non-CoVEs; they are not as professional, are inflexible, bad at record-keeping, and tend to be 'second rate'.

However, a number of negative comments were also made.

- There is more that CoVEs can do; for example, taking on more learners to meet the demands of the industry.
- Often, providers will fill their courses with full-timers to gain funding; funding part-timers is an employer/trainee burden.
- CoVE provision varies, and staff can be difficult to pin down.
- A lot of training and assessment is left to the employer.
- CoVE status is irrelevant; what is important is that the provider is responsive and able to accommodate trainees.
- Often, in terms of quality of provision, there is no difference between CoVE and non-CoVE providers; location is important.
- CoVEs do not market themselves well, and they do not make themselves appeal to employers; they are only one resource among many.

3.3.2 Widening participation

Building crafts

All the **CoVEs** provided details of a number of initiatives that were in place or being developed to widen participation in building crafts. Examples are discussed below.

It is widely recognised that women are under-represented, and four of the five CoVEs mentioned their involvement with the CITB's Women in Construction initiative. While women are under-represented both on college courses and as workers in the industry, one CoVE is making in-roads in this particular area: 15% of the school of construction's student population is female and 35% of the staff are women, including two senior managers. The college has worked hard to provide an environment that will encourage women learners, and it works closely with women's organisations in the area. Another CoVE had received a number of enquiries about its plastering course from women, and

has now decided to provide a dedicated course just for women. Another CoVE has a member of staff dedicated to recruiting women learners.

The data analysis in section 3.2 has shown that it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the recruitment of women learners to building crafts courses in London CoVEs, because the data cover the whole construction area. What it does show is that while the number of women enrolling has more than doubled since 2002/03, their proportion of the learning population dropped by 1% in 2004/05 to 17%.

A number of CoVEs mentioned the strong representation of learners from an ethnic minority background within their student population – 45% in one school of construction. A number also mentioned the core outreach work that is done with schools and parents and the ‘taster’ sessions that are organised. The data analysis shows that enrolments of learners from all ethnic backgrounds have increased in the construction area. In 2004/05, those of a non-white background represented 40% of the learner population.

Only two CoVEs mentioned the work they are doing with people with disabilities. One runs ‘taster’ sessions, where people with both physical and learning disabilities are able to sample the learning environment. Another mentioned the work it does with special schools that cater for people with learning difficulties. However, it was pointed out that there are issues around the nature and needs of the industry (health and safety) that can make it difficult for some learners with disabilities to work in the industry.

Other initiatives mentioned included work with unemployed people and the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses alongside building crafts courses.

Given the different types of **partner organisations** interviewed (including the SSC and the LDA), a wide range of views was expressed regarding widening participation. In terms of women’s representation in the industry and on college courses, it is recognised that much is being done to try and encourage their participation. It was also noted that the SSC is trying to encourage women’s involvement at the higher levels of organisations so that top-down change can take place. Given the strict health and safety regulations now in place on building sites, concerns about women not being able to cope with the physical aspect should not be an issue these days. However, as one interviewee pointed out, barriers for women – and for minority ethnic groups – centre on skills levels and the lack of childcare facilities. In the former context, work in the construction industry is often seen as work for those who have done poorly at school. It was also pointed out that women and minority ethnic groups have difficulty accessing training.

A number of partner organisations were concerned that the funding system was a barrier to widening participation. A variety of views were put forward.

- Funding is being focused on 16–18 year olds, and so there are fewer opportunities for those in the older age groups.
- There is no full funding for those who have recently become unemployed.
- Long-term funding is required to support women entering the traditional trades; many women will only be able to enter the workplace after bringing up children.
- More funding is required to encourage women to take up apprenticeships.
- Colleges receive more funding for full-time learners than for learners who study part time and/or are unemployed; many women will tend to be in these latter categories.

On the whole, most **employers** did not feel able to comment in detail on issues regarding widening participation. Of those that did, three were concerned about taking on people

with disabilities; the main issue appeared to focus around the ability of people to work safely on a construction site. Other comments were made about the limited ethnic mix in the workforce and the fact that the trade is male-dominated, although in some areas, such as carpentry, women's participation is good. One employer commented that most of the firm's workers are white and English, although there are many eastern European workers in the industry. With regard to immigrant workers, language issues were raised pertaining to health and safety. One employer was of the view that colleges were not doing enough to widen participation; this particular employer deliberately targets and recruits people from ethnic minorities, women and people with disabilities. Another employer was concerned about the lack of training opportunities for the unemployed; one barrier was that a person had to be unemployed for at least six months.

Hospitality

Attracting young, white males on to hospitality courses was mentioned as a problem by two of the hospitality **CoVEs**. One CoVE was trying to address this issue through a targeted marketing campaign, but it was too early to say how effective it had been; the other was planning visits to schools. One of the CoVEs encourages potential learners with a disability by providing work experience in the college's café and restaurants. However, a number of CoVEs raised concerns about learners with disabilities and health and safety issues in a kitchen environment. One CoVE mentioned that it runs ESOL courses alongside its courses for speakers of other languages.

One of the barriers to widening participation mentioned by two of the CoVEs is that cookery has been taken out of the school curriculum, and should be reintroduced. Schools should also provide better careers guidance about the industry. Others pointed to the work they do with schools, parents and teachers to encourage as diverse a learner population as possible. The data analysis in section 3.2 shows that enrolments of learners from all ethnic backgrounds have increased in the hospitality CoVEs. In 2004/05, those of a non-white background represented 36% of the learner population.

Of the **partner organisations**, one interviewee was of the view that there was such a shortage of labour that employers were not able to pick and choose. Two felt that the industry had no difficulty recruiting women and ethnic minorities, but, as noted in the literature review, most recruitment was to the lower-level, basic entry jobs and therefore the problem for these groups was breaking through the 'glass ceiling'. One interviewee felt that widening participation issues were not talked about in the industry, and that NVQs needed to incorporate diversity issues. Another felt strongly that widening participation issues needed firmer embedding in colleges' strategic plans and admissions policies; there was a feeling that some colleges were just engaged in a 'ticking boxes' exercise. It was also pointed out that colleges operating in ethnically diverse communities were probably much better at attracting learners from minority ethnic backgrounds than other colleges operating in less ethnically diverse areas.

Again, some of the **employers** felt they could not comment with authority on the effectiveness of the vocational education and training sector in meeting widening participation agendas. Two felt the sector appeared to be doing so, while one felt the agendas were too disjointed, access to funds was not transparent and information about courses was not made available. Employers were more at ease talking about the industry. One commented that it was dominated by people who are white, male and educated. Others felt that the industry was very diverse and, as employers, they recruit anyone as long as they have the necessary skills and experience. Two employers felt that disability would be problematic in a pressurised kitchen environment.

3.3.3 External relationships

Building crafts

CoVEs indicated that their engagement with employers was extensive, and most mentioned their employers' forum. All indicated that they had very good relationships with the SSC, as the colleges all take on apprentices placed by CITB-ConstructionSkills. Two CoVEs highlighted the problem of engaging with employers, mainly because of employers' time commitments. However, examples were provided where employers come into the college to demonstrate new innovations and techniques in the industry. But, as far as employer involvement in the curriculum and teaching was concerned, it appeared not to be happening. One CoVE pointed out that 'what employers want is the college to provide the training but they do not want to be involved in it themselves. If the training is done well, more apprentices will be sent the following year.'

The majority of CoVEs mentioned that employer feedback was collected on a regular basis either through meetings or questionnaires. CITB-ConstructionSkills contracts with all five London CoVEs as well as other training providers to train its apprentices. The contracts are closely monitored, and because of this, the SSC works closely with the CoVEs. In this context, the CoVEs mentioned that SSC feedback was provided through the SSC's routine monitoring of contracts. Feedback was also collected through staff attendance at various employer and SSC meetings.

As mentioned above, the SSC has relationships with each CoVE. The LDA is involved, but in a different way, through various initiatives which may or may not involve CoVEs. The LDA's main role is with employers. As for the other **partner organisations** interviewed, all said they worked closely with the CoVEs, and that this was vital in a partnership.

With regard to the **employers** interviewed, all felt their involvement with the CoVE was satisfactory. Their views about wanting more involvement were mixed. Some felt that what they were doing was enough, and spending more time would be problematic, as they have businesses to run. One categorically did not want further involvement because it was funding the college to provide the training, and therefore it was the college's responsibility to deliver quality training. On the other hand, some would like more involvement in helping to set the curriculum and making it more relevant, to help with the flow of information about changes in the industry and about the apprentices themselves. One also mentioned that it would like to develop a more fixed, formal structure for employer involvement. Where dissatisfaction was expressed, it was in terms of feedback from the college on apprentices' attendance and progress monitoring; three employers made this criticism.

Hospitality

CoVEs commented that their involvement with employers was extensive, although one mentioned that it was often difficult engaging small, local employers because of funding issues. One CoVE mentioned its successful relationship with contacts in the 'contract and in-house catering' sub-industry. It felt this particular sub-industry was largely overlooked by learners and entrants to the industry; yet 'contract and in-house catering' is unique in the hospitality industry, in that it can offer an alternative type of employment and more sociable hours of work.

Only one CoVE mentioned its close working relationship with the SSC; the others commented that they had not had much involvement to date. This was confirmed in the interview with the SSC representative. The SSC was relatively new and, given resource constraints, issues had to be prioritised. In the future a dedicated member of staff will be

identified to work with the CoVEs. Most CoVEs appeared to collect feedback from employers, through surveys, attendance at meetings and employers' forums.

All the **partner organisations** mentioned that their involvement with the CoVEs was satisfactory or better. It appeared that of those interviewed, their involvement was quite extensive and, as such, any further involvement would not be desirable, given time and resource constraints. In the interview with the LDA representative, it was suggested that regular updates from the CoVE network about what was happening would be useful; this could help prevent any potential duplication of effort.

As for the **employers** interviewed, most were very satisfied with their involvement with the CoVEs. Again, there was a split as to whether employers felt they wanted more involvement. Those that did not were concerned about the time commitment. Those that did mentioned more involvement in the curriculum, meeting students at open days and 'seeing the hotel used as a training environment' (this latter comment came from an employer in the process of negotiating a closer relationship with the CoVE concerned).

3.3.4 Skills shortages and the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games

Building crafts

The Olympics is a major construction undertaking. However, it is important to realise that in the general scheme of things, it isn't any bigger than other major projects that have been seen in Greater London in the very recent past.

(CITB-ConstructionSkills and SummitSkills 2005)

In discussing the impact of the Olympic Games in 2012 and the implications for the vocational education and training sector, the **CoVE** interviewees presented a range of views. One CoVE felt that more people will need to be qualified to Level 2, and it had plans to expand most in this area; even so, it was of the view that it will still be impossible to meet the demand. Another CoVE felt that because demand from the industry is, and will continue to be, so high, there are concerns that standards may drop. In terms of supplying the industry with qualified and skilled labour, two CoVEs agreed that there are always shortages, but in terms of the Olympics it depends on the architecture for the buildings and the materials to be used for construction, and until this is known it is difficult to prepare. Another CoVE felt that it is likely that the skills needs will be centred on new technologies and, therefore, responding to training needs will be difficult because of lead-in times. Other matters will be those associated with resources, the provision of staff and training facilities – and funding. One CoVE was of the view that new and/or additional courses will need to be offered now, and even then demand will probably not be met.

A number of CoVEs were of the view that shortages will be met by foreign labour. In this context, some of the CoVEs were providing ESOL courses to help learners overcome language difficulties; another was looking at ways to convert foreign qualifications into UK-recognised ones. One CoVE felt that there was a great need to engage with minority ethnic groups in the college's area, which provided a large pool of untapped potential labour. However, some of the CoVEs cautioned that while the Olympics will exacerbate the skills shortage in London, it is only one of many projects in the city, and CoVE involvement in these other projects will be an advantage (eg the Thames Gateway) as it will provide experience of large projects.

Similar views were expressed by the **partner organisations**. The LDA also placed emphasis on the fact that the Olympics is only one of a number of large developments in London. With the Olympics, however, the important issue is that it is finished on time and,

therefore, the main focus is a political one. The LDA itself was in the process of developing a local employment and training framework for the Olympics. SSC interviewees also highlighted the lack of clarity about architecture and building materials. The likelihood is that modern methods of construction will be used (such as glass and steel) and therefore it was felt unlikely that the CoVEs will be able to respond. Using the example of Heathrow Airport's Terminal 5, it was pointed out that some of the companies involved in the building are foreign because they are the only ones that can deliver the technology; the labour used is therefore likely to be foreign, and temporary. Thus, for the Olympics, it may not be a question of filling a skills gap, but an employer gap. Another point of note is that stadia development is very specialist, and will not be sustainable in the long term, although some skills may be transferable to other developments.

Other views expressed by partner organisations were that:

- some construction firms may be reluctant to get involved because of the high wage premiums
- the labour force will be both national and international – some of the skills requirements are only to be found abroad
- while the Olympics will have an enormous impact, it might just be the catalyst which makes everyone understand the needs of the industry
- demand for skills needs to be met now.

Employers were concerned about the effect the Olympics will have on their businesses. Some recognised that while there will be a lot of work, much of it will be given to the big construction companies. Moreover, the big multinational companies will take on the labour force, so it will be difficult to recruit new skilled staff and to find apprentices. It was also felt that there will be a demand for managers, which again will leave a recruitment gap for small companies, and employers will find it difficult to find quality training for their employees.

Hospitality

Hospitality **CoVEs** were also of the view that the Olympics will exacerbate labour and skill shortages. The shortages that will need to be filled will be for supervisory staff and qualified and skilled chefs. However, it was felt that these shortages are being, and will be, covered by foreign workers. Most demand for training will be at Level 2, although as there will be a huge shortage of staff with supervisory qualifications and skills, Level 3 could also be important. Most of the CoVEs were of the opinion that, to have an effect, any new courses would need to be offered now. However, one CoVE felt that many of the Olympic workers are likely to be unqualified or without recognised qualifications. Some concern was expressed that the Olympic event itself is a short period – what happens afterwards, and the need to ensure sustainability, were of concern. Another was of the view that because of the numbers that need to be trained to meet the skills shortages, there must be cooperation between the providers.

In discussions with the LDA and SSC, the view was expressed that skills shortages are likely to be in the customer service area. However, there was concern that if people are trained too soon, will they be around in 2012? Labour shortages are likely to be met by people from the new EU accession countries, but again there are questions about whether they will remain after the event. Similar to some of the views expressed above was that while the Olympics will have a huge impact, it will only be for a short period; its main effect will be to act as a catalyst and provide a sense of urgency to the shortages that already exist.

Other **partner organisations** held similar views to those already expressed.

- The Olympics will have a dramatic effect on employment and skills needs, alongside all the other developments taking place in the area.
- Britain lacks good customer service unlike other countries; this area needs investment.
- Skills shortages will mostly be met by new immigrants from eastern Europe, but this has political and social implications.
- What will happen after 2012?

One interviewee expressed the concern that the skills gap and labour shortages will make the UK a huge international embarrassment. Another was concerned that there is no implementation plan, and it is not clear who is driving the strategy to make sure that skills needs will be met. Other views expressed were that there seems to be little talk about the feeding and housing of Olympic competitors and visitors – most attention seemed to focus on construction. A suggestion was made that courses need to be marketed now, and in relation to their relevance to the Olympics, so as to create demand.

Similar, but also sometimes contradictory, views were expressed by the **employers**. Again, many showed concern for their businesses and how they will be affected. For example, it was felt that the shortage of staff created during the Olympics will affect all businesses, although one employer felt that the Olympic site itself will take on staff and train them and, therefore, once the games are over everyone can benefit.

Employers felt that the effects of the Olympics would be massive. Once again, many employers felt that gaps and shortages will be filled by immigrant labour, and the skills required for the games will be relatively basic – the Olympics will produce ‘an army of unskilled and unqualified volunteers’. Concerns were expressed that the large contract catering companies will swallow up the demand for staff. There will be a scramble for employees. Demand will be at all levels, especially for well-qualified chefs. The view was also expressed that people are likely to become better qualified nearer the time, so that they can take up the better positions on offer.

With regard to training, one employer felt that it was very difficult for colleges to react to one-off events like the Olympics. Other views expressed in this context were somewhat similar to those of the partner organisations.

- The effort from the vocational education and training sector to supply courses needs to be better coordinated, and to start now.
- There are not enough professionals and academics to train employees to higher levels.
- There does not seem to have been much thinking up to now.

3.4 Learner focus groups

Section summary

The learners who were interviewed were mixed in terms of the level and types of qualifications being taken, the mode in which they were training and studying, and their social characteristics, experiences and expectations. The views expressed were varied and wide-ranging, both within and between the groups.

Learners mentioned few barriers about getting on to courses. Of the difficulties experienced and mentioned were managing time, juggling assignments with work and difficulties with and/or the frequency of assignments. The support received from tutors was found to be helpful.

Many learners on building crafts courses saw the relevance of the qualifications they hoped to gain as a way of continuing and progressing in the industry in which they worked; others mentioned their wish to progress further with their education and training. Of the hospitality learners, most were doing their courses so that they could gain entry to the industry or set up their own businesses. A qualification was felt necessary to achieve these goals. Some expressed a wish to continue with their education and training.

A learner focus group was held in each of the CoVEs taking part in the project (two were held in one CoVE, resulting in six groups in building crafts CoVEs and four in hospitality CoVEs). The types of questions asked of the groups were:

- What were you doing before this course?
- Why are you doing the course?
- Why did you select this provider?
- How did you find out about the course?
- Were there any barriers to getting on to the course?
- Are you experiencing any difficulties on the course?
- What do you intend to do next?

The groups were varied in terms of the level of qualification being followed and the mode of attendance.

3.4.1 Building crafts

Of the six focus groups, three were work-based learners (two at Level 3 and one at Level 2) in carpentry and shop fitting. One group was following a painting and decorating course; most of its members were at Level 2, and were a mixture of full-time, part-time and work-based learners. The other group was following a full-time BTEC First Diploma in the built environment.

Of the Level 3 carpenters, most had completed a Level 2 qualification at the same college, and a few had transferred from another college. Of those following the Level 2 carpentry course, most were working in the building trade. All were doing the course because it was necessary, and most were being supported financially by their employers. The Level 2 group were aware that if they did not qualify then they could not work as carpenters; the Level 3 groups raised the fact that the better qualified they were, the more money they could earn. Of the other two groups, the majority of learners had either been at school or had completed Level 1. A mixture of views was given about why they were doing the courses.

For the Level 3 learners in two groups, the employer had chosen the provider; one group had applied through CITB and had been allocated a college. Most were not aware that their college had CoVE status. For one group, the fact that the college was a member of the Carpentry Guild had greater significance. In the other two groups, some of the learners were aware that the college had CoVE status, but none knew what it stood for.

In terms of finding out about the course, two of the carpentry groups (one Level 2 and the other Level 3) were told to attend the college by their employers. The other group mentioned the progression within the college from Level 2 to Level 3; two learners in this group had transferred to the college from another provider on the advice of their employers because it was perceived to be a better course. As for the other two focus groups, the learners mentioned a variety of ways in which they found out about the courses: prospectuses, website, school, Connexions and relations.

As for barriers to getting on to the course, few groups mentioned any. In one Level 3 carpentry group, funding was raised as an issue in terms of not being paid when attending college. Finding funding for someone over 24 years of age who wishes to change career was deemed problematic. Another Level 3 carpentry group felt that one of the biggest barriers was finding a work placement.

Of the difficulties experienced and communicated by the carpentry groups once on the course, one Level 3 group mentioned the class size as being too big, and the amount of paperwork problematic and challenging. This group also mentioned that practical-based work in the college was 'always set out perfectly, whereas on-site things are seldom perfect'. This group also raised issues about the lack of communication between the college and the employer in terms of what tutors expect the learners to be doing on-site and what they actually end up doing. The BTEC group was concerned about the difficulty and frequency of the assignments. This group also expressed disappointment that the course was not more practical, and at the lack of information made available to them about what to expect. In terms of the support mechanisms provided by CoVEs to help learners overcome any difficulties, two of the carpentry groups mentioned the excellent support they receive from tutors. The other carpentry group at Level 3 was ambiguous about the amount of support they wanted. On the one hand, they wanted more support, but on the other, they didn't want to be 'wet-nursed'.

Learners comprising the two Level 3 carpentry groups all intended to continue in the industry; some mentioned the possibility of gaining experience and then moving into supervisory roles; some saw themselves progressing to Level 4. The two groups were satisfied with their courses, and recognised the value of qualifications. The group of Level 2 carpenters wanted to continue to work as carpenters, and a Level 2 qualification would enable them to do so. Some mentioned progressing to Level 3, but all felt that their current employer would not support this because a Level 2 qualification was seen as adequate. Of the BTEC learners, the majority mentioned wanting to move on to the National Diploma at the same college. Most of the Level 2 painters and decorators wished to progress to Level 3.

3.4.2 Hospitality

The four focus groups were:

- Level 2 and 3 learners studying food preparation, full time
- Level 2 and 3 learners studying for the chef diploma, full time
- Level 2 hospitality management learners studying full time
- Level 3 chef diploma learners studying full time.

Most of the learners on the Level 2 and Level 2/3 courses had come from school, progressed within the college or had attended the junior chef course on a Saturday. Of the Level 3 group of learners, all had progressed from Level 2 within the same college.

As for reasons for doing the course, most mentioned that it was necessary to work in the industry. One group of Level 2/3 learners mentioned that a Level 2 qualification is the very least required, and most wanted to continue to Level 3 to run their own businesses.

Reasons for choosing the college were again mixed. Some mentioned that it was a natural continuation of their studies; some were advised that the college had a good reputation; others that the college was close to where they lived. Very few knew about the CoVE status; some had been aware of the college's reputation and excellent facilities. One group expressed surprise that more had not been made of the status to promote the college; however, most in this group felt that it would not have made a difference to their decision to apply because they knew it was best.

In terms of barriers to getting on to the course, few groups mentioned any, apart from the admissions requirements, although in one group of Level 2/3 learners, some felt it was too easy to get on to the course. The Level 3 learners mentioned problems like childcare difficulties, the financial situation, travelling, and the temptation to go back to work after Level 2.

Of the difficulties experienced while on the course, mention was made of juggling coursework and employment, difficulties with assignments, time management, and the difference between work placements and working in the college's real work environment. All but one of the groups felt that the support they got from tutors was helpful; the other group felt that while their tutors were approachable, they did not have the time to help – 'it's easier to get help from other learners on the course'. One set of learners mentioned the college's VLE, which, it was suggested, was a useful learning tool to prepare and catch up with the programme.

Asked what they intended to do next, there were mixed responses, and some groups felt more able to answer this question than others. Some wanted to continue with their studies, while others wanted to go straight into the industry. One Level 2 group felt that their course was increasing their employability chances because it taught the 'soft skills' of good communication and confidence, something they felt employers wanted.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this project was to assess the extent to which vocational progression pathways have been developed and enhanced in two occupational areas – building crafts and hospitality – in nine London CoVEs.

The objectives were to ascertain:

- how well CoVEs have performed in the provision of vocational progression pathways
- the impact of CoVEs on learners and their participation
- the development of external relationships
- the likely impact of the 2012 Olympics Games on employment and skills needs.

Previously, this report has drawn attention to the limitations of the research (including the challenges of accessing the target groups for interview and the paucity of data on learner enrolments and achievements). The following conclusions must be viewed in this context.

4.1 The nature of the occupational areas

As the literature review has shown, the construction and hospitality industries are two of the largest employment sectors in Greater London. However, both suffer constraints. Among these are the under-representation of women and minority ethnic workers in the construction industry; in hospitality, the majority of workers are women, and minority ethnic groups are well represented, but most occupy basic-level jobs. Both industries are characterised by workforces with low-level or no qualifications, and Level 2 qualifications have currency. In the construction industry, this latter fact is compounded by the dominance of small businesses or sole traders that are reluctant to release staff for training beyond Level 2, which helps militate against a training culture. These characteristics present challenges to London's CoVEs operating in these occupational areas.

4.2 The nature of learner and employer demand

Our data analysis and interviews have shown that in the majority of **building crafts** and **hospitality** CoVEs demand is high at Level 2, but less so at Level 3. Level 2 qualifications have currency in both the industries. Demand for courses tends to be a mixture of employer and learner demand.

The challenge to CoVEs of increasing enrolment and achievement at Level 3 is complex. On the one hand, Level 2 qualifications have currency in both the building crafts and hospitality industries and many employers fail to recognise the relevance of Level 3 qualifications to their businesses and/or are reluctant to pay for the cost of training. On the other hand, CoVEs may operate in a catchment area with a potential learner population that lacks the interest, capability or financial resources to undertake Level 3 qualifications in these occupational areas; or the work experience opportunities have yet to be cultivated, or are not available to allow learners to train in these areas and at this level. These are some of the areas where further investigation is needed.

4.3 Barriers to progression

In our interviews, the lack of currency of Level 3 qualifications in the industries was seen as the main barrier to progression for learners. Reasons included those outlined in 4.1 and 4.2 above. There is also some scepticism among employers

and partner organisations about the relevance of NVQs, especially in the **hospitality** area. In **building crafts**, the difficulties of placing employed apprentices on building crafts courses were noted. This appears to be a London-specific problem.

4.4 Engagement with employers and SSCs

CoVE engagement with employers is extensive in both occupational areas; the majority of CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers. All the **building crafts** CoVEs have good relationships with CITB-ConstructionSkills – the SSC. Opportunities to develop relationships between the **hospitality** CoVEs and People 1st (the SSC for HLTT), should be explored further as SSC capacity is developed.

4.5 Higher-level skills training

In **building crafts**, there was some support for higher-level skills training for better-qualified managerial staff and project managers, and in relation to new building materials and technologies. In **hospitality**, the needs for higher-level skills training were identified to develop management, supervisory and communications skills.

4.6 Widening participation

All CoVEs were working hard to widen participation to learning through outreach activities. In **building crafts** CoVEs an important focus was on improving the representation of women on CoVE courses and in the industry. Funding was identified as a major barrier to widening participation, especially for older workers, women returners and the unemployed. In **hospitality**, a challenge for some of the CoVEs was recruiting young, white males. While learners with disabilities are encouraged by both building crafts and hospitality CoVEs, there are concerns about health and safety and working on a building site and in a kitchen environment.

4.7 Dissemination of good practice and knowledge

All CoVEs have developed well-established and extensive networks for disseminating good practice and knowledge externally – within the regional and national CoVE network, with non-CoVE providers, through teaching staff networks and professional associations, employers' forums and specialist development groups. However, in the majority of CoVEs, dissemination to other colleagues *within* the host college (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less well established.

4.8 The likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games

Views expressed by many interviewees about the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games were tentative. In the **building crafts** area, there is a lack of clarity regarding the architecture and building materials that will be used; until this is known it is impossible to say whether CoVEs will be able to respond to the demand for qualified and skilled workers. In building crafts, CoVEs are responding to the influx of foreign workers and learners by providing ESOL courses, and are looking at ways of converting foreign qualifications into UK-recognised ones.

In both occupational areas, the general view was that labour and skills shortages will be exacerbated, although much demand will be filled by foreign workers. In

the **hospitality** area, it is likely that most training requirements will be at Level 2, although there may be demand for Level 3 qualifications due to the shortage of workers with supervisory skills.

4.9 Learner experiences

Learner groups were mixed in terms of what they were studying, their social characteristics, and their experiences and expectations – thus, the views expressed were mixed. Few barriers to getting on to the course were mentioned. Some difficulties ‘on course’ were noted (eg managing time and juggling work with study) but support from tutors was welcomed and helpful. Many saw the relevance of the qualifications they hoped to gain, either as a way of entering the industry or of continuing and progressing in the industry they already worked.

5 Recommendations

For CoVEs

- 5.1 Review and investigate ways of further developing the outreach work with schools, potential learners and their parents, to promote vocational education and training opportunities in the context of the new diplomas and the expansion of the 14–19 vocational route. Opportunities for developing outreach work with the newly formed and emerging lifelong learning networks should also be explored.
- 5.2 Review and investigate ways of further developing the work with employers to promote the relevance and benefits of training and opportunities for full-cost, bespoke provision in the context of Train to Gain.
- 5.3 Review existing employer networks and investigate ways of further developing networks to include those employers who may not have previously accessed training in the context of Train to Gain target-setting.
- 5.4 Review communications with employers about work-based learners and agree what each partner can expect (eg from the CoVE, the employer should expect regular reports regarding work-based learners' progress in college; from the employer, the CoVE should identify the expectations of work-based learners in the workplace).
- 5.5 Continue to develop the well-established relationships with the SSC; where these do not exist, explore ways of working with the SSC.
- 5.6 Integrate specification for accurate completion of the ILR into the provider planning process and the New Measures of Success through the self-assessment process.
- 5.7 Consider ways of improving the marketing of the CoVE brand to schools' careers advisers, Connexions advisers, employers, potential learners and existing learners.
- 5.8 Ensure that teaching staff have recent and regular experience of the industry, and that it is reflected in curriculum design and development, and in teaching and assessment practices.
- 5.9 Continue to develop the outreach work with community groups, schools and other organisations to encourage diversity in the learner population.
- 5.10 Continue to raise awareness and explore issues in discussions with employers regarding widening participation to learning and diversity in the workplace.
- 5.11 Review (or explore where they do not already exist) relationships with HEIs to extend progression opportunities for learners.
- 5.12 Explore with the relevant senior management of the college, ways in which CoVE experiences, knowledge and practices can be disseminated to benefit the practice of others in the college.

For SSCs

- 5.13 Continue to market and promote the full range of vocational education, training and employment opportunities to schools, and education and training provision to employers – including the benefits of the CoVE programme.
- 5.14 Continue to review current vocational education and training opportunities with CoVEs, other providers and the LSC to ensure that the industry's qualifications and skills needs are being met.
- 5.15 Continue to develop existing relationships with CoVEs; where they do not exist, priority should be given to establishing relationships and ways of working.
- 5.16 Continue (or prioritise where they have not been established) efforts to raise awareness among employers about issues regarding widening participation and diversity.
- 5.17 Continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure clear mechanisms for bringing the national skills academies and CoVEs together to form effective networks and to identify gaps in the existing CoVE network.

For the LSC and other stakeholders

- 5.18 Continue to review current vocational education and training opportunities with SSCs and other key stakeholders to ensure that qualifications and skills needs are being met.
- 5.19 Fully promote and develop the Train to Gain initiative to ensure that employers are encouraged to make the most of the brokerage service available.
- 5.20 Ensure that the reaccreditation process is guided by key regional partners, such as the LDA and relevant SSCs, to meet regional and local skills needs by providing high-quality and cost-effective provision that meets Agenda for Change priorities.
- 5.21 Review regional ILR input and quality review systems, and prioritise development of common unique learner identifiers within ILRs. Establish clear data-completion standards for all providers. Publicise these performance levels and timelines for achievement, along with warnings that failure to attain these could jeopardise reaccreditation and have a negative impact on future LSC funding.
- 5.22 Encourage schools to raise the profile of the vocational route among learners and their parents and to promote the full range of opportunities through the 14–19 curriculum pathways in the borough learning prospectus.
- 5.23 Ensure that LAAs encourage schools to promote the full range of opportunities provided by building crafts and hospitality qualifications to *all* learners, not just to low achievers, and ensure that through the Children and Young People's Partnership Boards vocational provision is identified as of equal importance as the academic route. Set local first Level 2 qualifications as part of LAA targets.
- 5.24 For building crafts provision for adults, OSAT can be highly effective, and the Train to Gain initiative should be used to develop delivery here. For young people, emphasis should be on the delivery of apprenticeships for the under-19s.

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Appendix 1. Literature identified for the review

The literature reviewed for the research is listed here and in the references section (see page 80).

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Appendix 2. List of building crafts and hospitality CoVEs participating in the project

Building crafts:

Barking College

Building Crafts College

College of North West London

Hackney Community College

Lambeth College

Hospitality:

Croydon College

Lewisham College

Thames Valley University

Westminster Kingsway College

Appendix 3. List of CoVE employer organisations interviewed

ABN-AMRO

Academy of Culinary Arts

Alan Rhodes Associates

Conran Restaurants

Croydon Park Hotel

Firmco Limited

London Borough of Hackney

Kier Islington (for two CoVEs)

Mayborne Hotel Group

MTA Associates

O'Sullivan's Catering

Sandwood Construction

Seaflame Company Ltd

Appendix 4. List of CoVE partner organisations interviewed

Asian and Oriental School of Catering

Compass UK

CITB-ConstructionSkills

Kingston University

People 1st

Redbridge College

Robert Clack School

Springboard Trust

Women into Construction

Young Builders Trust

Appendix 5. Project steering committee members

Member	Role/organisation
Liz Aitken	Formerly CoVE Manager, LSDA
Trixi Blaire	LSDA, London region
Carol Burgess	Consultant
Tom Gibney	CITB-ConstructionSkills
Maggie Greenwood	Head of Research, LSN
John Hall	Aimhigher, London region
Tony Holyland	People 1st
Ayub Khan	South London Connexions Ltd
Brenda Little	CHERI
John McDonald	Project Manager, LSC London North
Wayne Miller	Formerly CoVE Development Adviser, LSDA
Alison Morris	CoVE Manager, LSC
Phil Raynsford	People 1st
Mark Waterman	LDA
Ruth Williams	CHERI

Appendix 6. Limitations of the research

Sampling strategy

Any sampling strategy needs to be linked to the aims and objectives of the research. More often than not, decisions about the sample are affected by the resources available – both time and money. Inevitably, there will always have to be a compromise between the need for precision and the resources available. The sampling strategy is described in detail in section 2.

CoVE contacts acted as gatekeepers in terms of access to learners, partner organisations and employers, and negotiating access to CoVE contacts, in some cases, proved challenging. Employers, partner organisations and learners were recommended by the CoVE contacts and, thus, the sample produced may be a biased one.

Data collection instruments

Due to tight timescales, the interview schedules were not piloted in the field, although they did benefit from the comments of the project steering committee and others. As noted previously, the scope of the research was very broad, and the interview schedules covered a wide range of topics. Some respondents were unfamiliar with some of the terms used, such as *widening participation*; since the interviews were semi-structured, interviewers were able to offer a definition and give examples. Even so, some respondents, particularly employers, did not find all the questions salient to their situations and experiences. On topics such as the impact of the 2012 Olympics, some respondents did not feel adequately equipped to provide an authoritative view. Lack of data can be as revealing as data themselves.

Most of the interviews were conducted face to face, except those with employers, which were conducted over the telephone. An advantage of telephone interviews is that they enable data to be collected from geographically-dispersed respondents relatively cheaply and quickly. A disadvantage is that telephone interviews can be broken off more frequently than face-to-face interviews – it is simpler to end a telephone conversation than to ask an interviewer to leave. Telephone interviews also tend to be shorter than face-to-face interviews. This, in turn, can impact on the number of issues covered and the depth to which they can be explored. Furthermore, not all respondents will be comfortable being interviewed over the telephone; it is harder to establish rapport over the telephone, and it is not possible to use non-verbal cues. Nonetheless, the experience of the researchers was that telephone interviews were, in general, successful.

The limitations regarding learner data have been outlined in section 2.

Given the above limitations, the conclusions and recommendations that flow from the research must be seen within this context, while at the same time offering a starting point for more in-depth, follow-on studies.

Glossary

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
CITB	Construction Industry Training Board
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	further education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
HLTT	hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism
ILR	individual learner record
LAA	local area agreement
LDA	London Development Agency
LMI	labour market information
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
LSN	Learning and Skills Network
LSRC	Learning and Skills Research Centre
NEET	not in education, employment or training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OSAT	on-site assessment and training
PSA	Public Service Agreement
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SME	small or medium-sized enterprise
SSC	Sector Skills Council

StAR	strategic area review
VLE	virtual learning environment
WBL	work-based learning

