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EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund



The learning curve

How
workplace
partnerships
boost training
and skills



This publication is an outcome of the TUC's ESF EQUAL project, Building Opportunities through Workplace Learning. The project has developed and mainstreamed new approaches to extending participation in learning. This includes demonstrating how unions can negotiate learning agreements with employers to open up learning and skill opportunities for their members.

The full case studies are set out in *A Qualitative Evaluation of Union Learning Agreements*, TUC, 2006.

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Foreword



Brendan Barber

TUC General Secretary

This booklet argues that involving unions in the training agenda leads to greater investment in learning and skills and a fairer distribution of learning opportunities within the workforce. It shows how employers and employees gain in terms of productivity, pay, job satisfaction and motivation.

There is a strong case for unions to become more involved in increasing the demand for skills, since management prerogative has failed to deliver the necessary growth. Employers must begin working with unions to adopt "high performance" competitive strategies, based on quality jobs carried out by highly skilled staff.

The case studies in this publication demonstrate how unions can add value in a range of ways, from the establishment of learning centres and the shaping of apprenticeship programmes to the promotion of a learning culture in the workplace. They result from positive partnerships established by Union Learning Fund projects and are based on learning agreements.

The TUC firmly believes that this good practice could be the norm in many more workplaces if training were given its rightful place as a core issue for negotiation in union-recognised workplaces.

I hope that this booklet will inspire both unions and employers to establish learning agreements and partnerships and promote a lifelong learning culture at the workplace.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads 'Brendan Barber'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

January 2006

It's time to talk u

While more and more people are gaining access to learning at the workplace, the only way we're going to close the skills gap with our competitors is by putting training on the collective bargaining agenda.



The government has done much in recent years to increase the supply of learning and training, especially at the lower end of the market.

It's been right to do so: skill levels account for between 10 and 20 per cent of the UK's productivity gap with France and Germany (measured in Gross Domestic Product per hour).

But employer demand for skills remains relatively weak: while 20 per cent of employers report they have skills gaps, over 30 per cent didn't train any of their staff last year, and 1.5 million workers still lack the skills they need to do their jobs properly.

All this underlines how the predominantly voluntary training system in the UK is failing individuals, companies and the economy as a whole.

The system certainly does not fully meet the lifelong learning needs of the workforce.

Even the best employers consider they are meeting the learning and training needs of their staff by just helping them acquire the skills necessary to do their current jobs.

This is far too narrow an approach, given that workers change jobs on average seven times during their working lives. Instead, all employees should all be able, for instance, to acquire computer skills to help them progress up the career ladder, or switch to another job completely.

There is also a deep inequality in the distribution of training opportunities, with the people who have historically been trained the least tending to get the least training.

In fact, the more qualifications someone has and the higher the status of their job, the greater their chances of getting further training: managers get three times as many training days as non-managers.

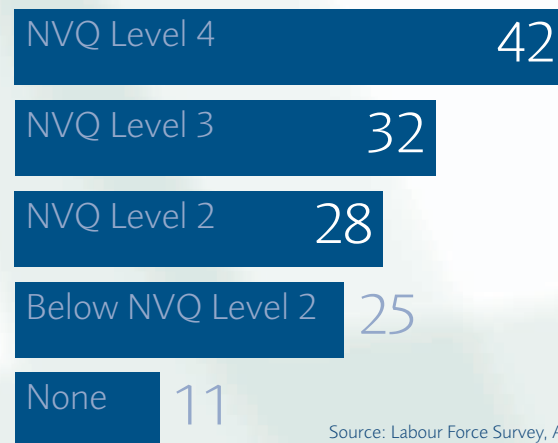
And particular groups of workers are also less likely to be offered training – older staff, part-time workers, and certain black and minority ethnic groups.

The wide disparities in the educational achievement of the UK adult population also compare badly with that of our competitors.

Although a relatively high proportion of adults have

high-level qualifications, there is a very large group with low or no qualifications – a polarity which can only damage our long-term prospects.

Figure 1: Percentage of employees receiving job-related training in last 13 weeks of survey by highest qualification held



Source: Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2004

But although union involvement in training clearly pays off for employer and employee alike (see over), training is still generally the poor relation when compared to joint engagement on pay and conditions and health and safety.

In fact, collective bargaining over training has been relatively insignificant compared to negotiation over pay and conditions, according to the 2004 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS).

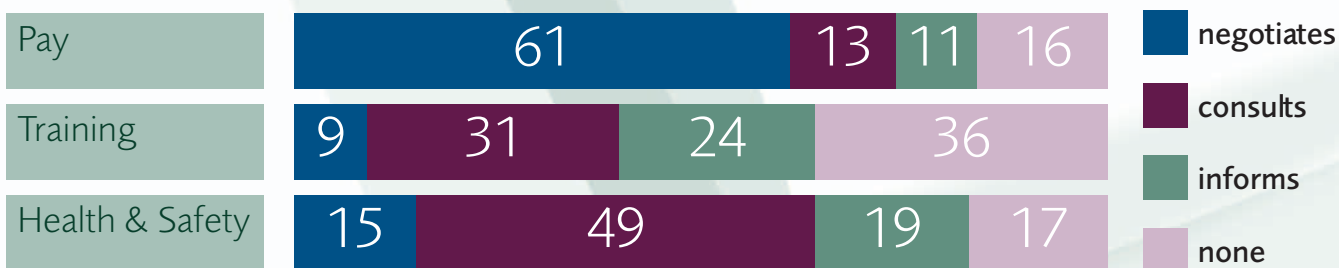
In over one-third (36 per cent) of union-recognised workplaces, employers do not negotiate, consult or even inform their union reps when it comes to training, more than twice the number who have nothing to do with their unions on pay or safety issues.

And in the workplaces where employers do involve themselves with union reps on training, information and consultation are far more widespread than negotiation: in

p training



Figure 2: Union involvement in pay, training and safety – Percentage of union-recognised workplaces with ten or more employees



Source: Workplace Employee Relations Survey, Autumn 2004

fact, fewer than one in ten employers agree to put training on the collective bargaining agenda.

The WERS results are mirrored by analysis of new voluntary union recognition agreements by London Metropolitan University's Working Lives Research Institute commissioned by the Department for Trade and Industry.

Training was only included in fewer than one in ten (7 per cent) of the deals and specifically excluded from almost one-third (31 per cent). Many agreements (57 per cent) included references to discussing 'terms and conditions' – which meant bargaining over training was neither ruled in or out.

The research confirmed how union learning representatives are facilitating joint activity going beyond employer-led work-related training and covering employee personal development.

It also identified evidence of considerable potential for bargaining. In the workplaces where training had been included in an agreement but not discussed since recognition was secured, the majority of employers (69 per cent) believed training would be considered a matter for negotiation (rather than information or consultation).

There could be good reasons for this apparent failure to exploit the potential to extend collective bargaining on training.

In the early stages of recognition, many unions seek to consolidate the bargaining relationship by focusing on the development of a consensual approach based on consultation, rather than pressing for full negotiation, the researchers pointed out.

What is clear is that unions have a major role to play in helping their members take advantage of the widening range of training and learning opportunities currently available.

It's now widely accepted that, by spreading the lifelong learning message on the ground, union learning representatives can help their members overcome the barriers created by lack of information, motivation, support, time and funding.

What needs to become more widely understood is that, by engaging with employers at the negotiating table, unions can help establish learning partnerships that can pay off for employers and employees alike.

The case studies in the pages that follow show exactly how much can be achieved when management and unions work together and training is included on the collective bargaining agenda.

How unions add

Maximising union involvement in the skills agenda pays off economically and socially, according to all the latest research.



Greater investment in training benefits employers and employees

- ▶ Increasing training has an even greater impact on productivity than it does on wages in the private sector, according to industrial relations specialists Lorraine Dearden, Howard Reed and John Van Reenen.
- ▶ Their research found that an increase of one percentage point in the proportion of employees trained improved productivity by about 0.6 per cent for a 0.3 per cent increase in wages.

Unionised workplaces invest more in training

- ▶ Union recognition goes hand-in-hand with private sector training, according to an analysis of the Workplace Employee Relations Survey by Rene Boheim and Alison L Booth. It is associated with reduced labour turnover and reduced wage dispersal, which helps maximise the return on investment in training.
- ▶ Union members get more training than non-members: 39 per cent of workers with a union card had done some training over a sample three-month period, compared with just 26 per cent of non-members, according to the Labour Force Survey 2003.

- ▶ This "learning premium" attached to the union card has strengthened in recent years, with the "training gap" between unionised and non-unionised employees widening from 11 to 13 percentage points since 1998. Over 2.5 million union members have undergone training over a sample three-month period, compared to over 2.2 million in 1998, according to the latest figures.
- ▶ And workers get more training when the issue is put on the negotiating table, and not just consulted about. In workplaces where training is negotiated, almost 40 per cent organise an average of five or more training days a year, but when it's only subject to consultation, less than 25 per cent match that figure.

Union involvement in training increases its impact on workforce development

- ▶ Moving training up the collective bargaining agenda can further boost the positive union effect, according to a study published by one of the leading economic research groups in Europe.

value



- ▶ The trade union movement could increasingly influence the ways in which people develop their productive capacity through education and training in the UK, forecast Francis Green, Stephen Machin and David Wilkinson in a discussion paper for the Centre for Economic Performance.
- ▶ And training is more likely to deliver benefits to members when unions not only secure recognition from the employer but also play an active role in decisions about what is provided, according to Jason Heyes and Mark Stuart in the British Journal of Industrial Relations.

Union involvement in training closes the gender gap

- ▶ Unionisation increases women's access to training, mirroring the way unionised workplaces have done more to close the gender gap on pay than the national minimum wage, according to David Metcalf, Professor of Industrial Relations at the London School of Economics.
- ▶ And while more training tends to lead to increased wages, the pay-off for union members is far greater: male trade union members tend to get 21 per cent more in their pay packets after training, while non-members get just 4 per cent more, he points out.

Union involvement in training leads to high performance practices

- ▶ When unions are directly involved in training policy decision at company level, firms are more likely to adopt practices which contribute to high-trust, high-performance workplaces, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's 2001 Training and Development Survey.

These include:

- ▶ staff attitude surveys
- ▶ workplace consultative committees
- ▶ job rotation
- ▶ mentoring
- ▶ train-the-trainer programmes
- ▶ quality circles.

Full details of all the studies quoted here can be found in the References on p13

Company	Merseytravel
Workforce	1,000
Sector	Public transport
Unions	Amicus, GMB, TGWU, Ucat, Unison

Why is learning important?

Developing the capabilities of the staff is necessary to enable them to play their part in Merseytravel achieving its objectives of creating a single integrated public transport network and increasing bus and rail usage in the locality.

Learning in the fast lane

The learning agreement is helping establish a learning culture throughout Merseytravel



A new learning agreement at Merseytravel is helping the public transport operation take off in the direction of success just as the region gears up for Liverpool's 2008 reign as Capital of Culture.

Thanks to the learning agreement at Merseytravel, the public transport operation is steadily developing a new learning culture throughout its three divisions (the Passenger Transport Executive, Mersey Ferries and Mersey Tunnels).

The agreement represented a fresh start at Merseytravel on a number of different levels:

- ▶ it re-established learning centres after the collapse of an earlier initiative
- ▶ it has helped drastically improve management-union relationships and achieve Investors in People in Mersey Tunnels
- ▶ it ushered in joint working between the five unions for the very first time.

Representatives from Merseytravel, the five unions, TUC North West Learning Services and the local Learning and Skills Council all put their names to the ground-breaking agreement in May 2003.

But unlike traditional partnership deals, the Merseytravel agreement deliberately sidestepped setting out detailed obligations and rights of all the parties.

What has been achieved?

- ▶ Over a third of the workforce studying in the learning centres
- ▶ Improved industrial relations and reduced sickness absenteeism
- ▶ All the unions worked together with management to achieve Investors in People

Instead, it set out a framework for developing a comprehensive learning culture throughout the organisation.

"There were three separate training and development cultures in the separate parts of the organisation," explains Unison branch secretary Roger Irvine. "That's why we were conscious of the need to get a learning framework agreement and not get bogged down in the detail."

The agreement aims to encourage staff to participate in workforce development. It provides access to personal development opportunities by establishing learning centres in all three divisions under the banner of Merseylearn.

It also sets out the membership of the Joint Learning Forum, which comprises three employer and two union learning reps from the Passenger Transport Executive; one employer and two learning reps from Mersey Tunnels; and one employer and one union learning rep from Mersey Ferries.

In addition, ex-officio members include the personnel manager Liz Chandler and a member of the accounts department; Unison's Roger Irvine (as senior shop steward); and representatives from Greater Merseyside LSC, TUC Learning Services and the TGWU education department.

The forum focuses on meeting the learning needs of manual workers (on lower grades and shiftwork) who have few formal qualifications or none. Its role is to:

- ▶ oversee learning policies and provision
- ▶ monitor the Personal Development Review process
- ▶ review the training and development plan and the associated goals and targets for learning provision within the workplace
- ▶ oversee the workplace learning centres
- ▶ evaluate learning provision within the organisation and make recommendations to the management team and the Passenger Transport Authority.

Union learning reps (there are 28 currently trained at Merseytravel) are central to the success of the project, and the agreement spells out that should all have "the opportunity to take suitable training enabling them to offer support, advice and guidance to their members and work with the employer to introduce a learning culture into the workplace."

They meet every six weeks to exchange information and, in addition, they all have an annual review to identify their priorities.

A ULR's relationship with management is completely different to that of a shop steward's, explains Roger Irvine. "The ULR will be involved in discussions over training issues and will try to resolve any problems; suddenly you have somebody completely different coming in – a ULR with a positive approach – and it can make a difference."

The ULRs have played a pivotal role in helping to achieve Investors in People in Mersey Tunnels. "We wouldn't have achieved IiP if we hadn't set up a management-union consultation and communications group and trained the ULRs as Personal Development Review champions," says Liz Chandler.

Merseytravel is keen to support all its ULRs, whether they wish to concentrate mainly on helping their colleagues access learning or to take the opportunity of the role to further develop themselves.

"Some ULRs are just happy to do the job and that's fine," says Liz Chandler. "Others see it as developing towards a possible career in learning and we try and find support for them in that."

Of the 28-strong team, a number have taken additional courses on workforce development, running a learning centre, information, advice and guidance and Investors in People training.

In addition, eight have completed their City & Guilds Preparing To Teach course and two have finished the City & Guilds Teaching Adult Learner course.

One year after signing the agreement, the learning partners, led by the TGWU, secured financing from the government's Union Learning Fund to help staff get to grips with Skills for Life issues and tackle the "digital divide" between employees who are familiar with computers and those who aren't.

The ULF money pays for a Skills for Life tutor, an ICT tutor, a learning support worker and a peripatetic support worker, while Greater Merseyside LSC contributed £15,000 to cover capital costs.

Merseytravel itself provided the facilities for the three learning centres, and arranges paid time off for staff to take up Skills for Life learning and for ULRs to train and to carry out their work, in line with government guidelines.

Between them, the unions and North West TUC Learning Services cover the costs of additional training modules run by TUC Education for ULRs (eg, running a learning centre).

Chief executive Neil Scales is happy with the outcomes, not just for the individual learners but with the culture change throughout the organisation.

"Learning and development has top priority within Merseytravel: the Merseylearn project has gone from strength to strength and now a third of our staff have accessed some form of learning," he says.

When the ULF project comes to a close in March 2006, management and unions are committed to sustaining, developing and extending the learning activity it has helped get underway.

A further ULF bid hopes to roll out this activity to the wider local transport sector, including bus operators and taxi drivers.

Whatever happens, by the time Liverpool becomes European Capital of Culture in 2008, Merseytravel looks set to have become one of the region's capitals of workplace learning.

Company	Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery, Lincoln
Workforce	2,100
Sector	Power generation/industrial equipment
Unions	Amicus, GMB

Why is learning important?

The company needs to upskill its workforce as part of its plan to return the core gas turbine manufacturing business to profitability, and move on to capture 25 per cent of the global market share in the next five years.

Opening an onsite learning centre is helping Siemens maximise the potential of all its employees, such as fitter Dave Perry



We've got the power

At the Siemens gas turbine factory in Lincoln, workers are getting switched on to the power of lifelong learning, thanks to an energy-generating partnership between management and unions.

Through three major changes of ownership at Lincoln's gas turbine factory since the early 1990s, training has remained somewhere near the top of both the employer and union agendas.

Now a wholly-owned subsidiary of Siemens, the German-based engineering and electronics giant, Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery Ltd continues to place a high premium on developing the skills of the workforce.

The company runs a full National Vocational Qualification scheme to help established workers certify their ability to do the job and enhance their own status in the workplace.

For the past decade, the factory has also operated an apprenticeship programme to equip the next generation of workers with the skills they'll need to keep the business at the cutting edge: there are currently over 50 apprentices in craft production and over a dozen in technical design and manufacture.

More recently, it's introduced Mature Apprenticeships, open to workers over 25 years old: five employees have completed the course and the NVQ Level 3 in two-and-a-half years, 12 months faster than the average young person.

"The apprentice route is our biggest investment in the future and the unions work closely with the training department to ensure that nothing stands in the way of that investment," says senior Amicus convenor Chris Grimshaw.

What has been achieved?

- Learning centre with six satellites.
- Employer paying most of the courses costs.
- 124 employees taking the European Computer Driving Licence qualification.
- Seven employees working towards Open University degrees.
- 30 employees have taken National Literacy and Numeracy Tests.

And now learning opportunities are being extended to many more on the company's payroll, in the wake of a lifelong learning agreement between management and unions signed in August 2003.

Under the agreement, the company and site unions Amicus and the GMB created the framework for establishing a learning culture in the workplace.

It aims to:

- build a partnership and learning agenda across the company
- encourage employees to participate in learning and skills development
- transform the workplace into a virtual learning centre
- identify and support employees with Skills for Life needs
- promote equal opportunities when enhancing skill levels.

It establishes a joint union/employer learning partnership committee, which meets once a month to introduce, implement and monitor learning initiatives on site.

The agreement also specifies the support available to union learning representatives (there is currently a 10-strong team, with another six undergoing training).

ULRs get paid time off to train and carry out their duties (in line with recent legislation), and can use company internet and intranet facilities both to research learning opportunities and analyse learning data.

The aim is that the ULRs should draw up a development plan for all employees at the plant, regardless of whether or not they hold a union card.

Under the agreement, ULRs agree all training plans with the organisation development department before offering them to an individual if the courses require company investment or necessitate time off.

To help deliver the agreement's targets, a Union Learning Fund project is also currently underway at the factory.

Adopting a partnership approach to the initiative, the company provided the premises for a learning centre, the local Learning and Skills Council came up with over £5,000 to refurbish the offices and Amicus donated 11 computers.

Staff usually study onsite outside their normal working hours, although management can organise paid time off for learning if they think it's appropriate.

Siemens pays £150 per learner, while each individual has to cover 25 per cent of the costs of the course.

The learning and training agendas have particular relevance as the new owners seek to return the core gas turbine business to profitability (the successes of the servicing and commercial operations at the site had masked its losses prior to acquisition by Siemens).

Already a lean manufacturing programme has been put in place to drive down costs, but management is also keen on introducing further flexibility.

"We want to protect a core workforce within this business and within that workforce to manage fluctuations in our volume (whether positive or negative) by using a range of tools to increase flexibility," says human resources director Gavin Hayward.

"This will include the use of temporary labour or subcontracting work out when we have loads of work in and shrinking that back again when times are tough and we've got a reduced order book."

The unions recognise flexibility will need to be discussed around the negotiating table and that the agreement will probably need to be revised to meet the present requirements of the company and its workforce.

Developing a learning culture within the workplace is one of the company's top priorities, according to Gavin Hayward.

"We're seeking to maximise the potential of our employees by creating a culture whereby we have got a learning environment," he says. "This involves innovations to make learning more accessible to all the workforce such as Learndirect, the union learning centre and the use of union learning reps."

All the evidence suggests lifelong learning is now firmly embedded at the factory.

To date, over 100 workers have attended free bite-size courses in basic IT and foreign languages and 75 members of staff have started working towards the more advanced European Computer Driving Licence at the centre.

In addition, 15 employees have signed up for vocational courses through local colleges and seven of their colleagues have started Skills for Life courses to improve their literacy and numeracy.

And since it's hooked up to the Trade Union Hub, the centre can offer the full range of Learndirect courses, while six learning satellites have been opened in other locations around the company.

"Lifelong learning was introduced to the company at about the time of the sale of the operation to Siemens, and it's been gratifying to see how the new, Siemens style of management has continued to support us," says Chris Grimshaw.

"Another satisfying aspect of the project is to see how members with no previous union activity have become involved and are driving the learning agenda forward throughout the factory."

Small wonder, then, that the lifelong learning initiative at the plant was named "Learning Project of the Year" by the TUC in 2004. Management and unions must both hope it will help them achieve their goals in the future.



Apprentice fitter Gem Stobbart is one of dozens learning her trade at the plant

Company	VT Shipbuilding, Portsmouth
Workforce	1,000
Sector	Defence/commercial shipbuilding
Unions	CSEU (Amicus, GMB, TGWU, Ucatt); Prospect

Why is learning important?

The company needs to broaden the skills of the workforce as part of its bid for part of the work involved in the construction of new generation aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy.



Embedding the culture (from left): learners Wayne Dewet, Tony McKenna and Derek Hosey with senior shop steward Geoff Price

Shipshape and Portsmouth fashion

Unions and management at VT Shipbuilding's state-of-the-art facility in Portsmouth have set sail on a learning journey together.

Hundreds of workers at the VT shipyard in Portsmouth have been picking up Skills for Life and getting to grips with computers since management and unions signed a learning agreement in 2002.

The deal emerged as part of a Union Learning Fund project at the shipyard, launched a few months earlier.

The agreement established a learning partnership steering committee, comprising representatives from management, unions and providers, to oversee lifelong learning at the site.

It also involved opening a workplace learning centre, with the company providing the premises, helping kit it out with 12 computers, and covering all the consumables, such as files, folders and computer discs.

Under the agreement, the company agreed to support 15 union learning reps to deliver the ULF project, giving them paid time off both to train for their new role and to support their shopfloor colleagues.

The company also agreed to give workers paid release to attend Skills for Life assessments; and staff signing up to brush up their literacy and numeracy would get paid release for half the 30-hour course so long as they did the rest in their own time.

What has been achieved?

- The unions have worked with management on strategies to upskill the adult workforce to meet skill shortages.
- Almost 500 employees (half the workforce) have attended courses at the learning centre.
- The company won the regional prize in the Business in the Community Skills for Life Award.

In addition, some learners have been able to order computers through the company's Flexible Benefits programme, based on the government-supported Home Computer Initiative.

The agreement also backed a learning needs analysis to help prioritise learning needs, and put in place a monitoring process to keep track of employee achievements.

The lifelong learning agreement is the latest in a series of training agreements between management and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (comprising Amicus, GMB, TGWU and UCATT) at the shipyard.

A trainee welders' agreement was signed in 1988 to tackle the continuing shortage of skilled welders in the labour market.

The scheme is divided into three separate phases, spread over 18 months or so, with pay rates for trainees progressing as they complete each stage, and a joint management/union working party monitoring all aspects of the programme.

In addition, since 1999, the company has also been running an apprenticeship scheme, under which 14 apprentices are trained up to NVQ Level 3 every year.

The apprenticeship agreement sets out a four-phase scheme, which specifies what qualifications are necessary for each stage, and the pay rates trainees can expect as they progress.

The unions are pressing the company to set up a joint management/union working party to monitor the programme.

And since 2002, as part of a plan to upskill the wider workforce, the company has been recruiting older workers with an NVQ Level 2 and training them up to Level 3, under the adult training agreement.

Pay is based on progression through the NVQ framework, and the scheme is monitored by a joint working party.

But while these three agreements all arose out of the formal collective bargaining machinery at the shipyard, what marked the lifelong learning agreement as unique was that it emerged from a union-initiated dialogue on the broader learning agenda.

Another key difference was that individual learning achievement was deliberately not linked to pay or conditions of service.

Indeed, the agreement spelt out that the learning needs analysis would only succeed if everyone agreed the data would not be used in negotiations about pay, performance appraisal, redundancy selection or disciplinary procedures.

At the same time, a ten-strong team of union learning reps (all of them shop stewards) took the TUC ULR course, during which they drafted the learning agreement.

After the ULRs, other stewards and safety reps went on the first courses at the centre, its doors were formally opened to the rest of the workforce, with ICT courses running from July 2002.

Since the union learning needs survey had highlighted how significant numbers of workers had left school without any qualifications (and had had no training since), the project focused on extending opportunities for Skills for Life learning and further ICT courses in phase two (from September 2003 to August 2005).

With additional support from the South East England Development Agency, which was keen to upskill the workforce across the region, phase two aimed to:

- advise 150 potential learners about courses they would be interested in
- develop individual action plans for at least 50 learners, encouraging them to take National Tests at Levels 1 and 2
- provide ICT courses for at least 75 workers
- provide further ULR training, including Skills for Life awareness courses (also available to management).

"Union learning is the best thing that has ever happened to the trade union movement – it's something our members have been crying out for for years," says project manager (and senior shop steward) Geoff Price.

The unions' decision to run the learning centre themselves, instead of contracting it out, has proved the right thing to do, he argues.

"We know what our members want and we are here to deal with any problems," explains Geoff.

"If you leave it to someone else, there is always the view that 'we're paying all these outside people, but where is the money going to?'," he says.

VT management are equally enthusiastic about what has been achieved over the past four years.

"The good thing about the learning centre is that staff feel there's no manager or foreman watching over them: if they make mistakes, that's fine – they're with their colleagues," explains human resources director Trevor Cartwright.

The results speak for themselves. "Employees are eager to learn: those who used to find it difficult to read or write are now better able to communicate, having received their first formal qualification," says chief executive Paul Lester. "The learning centre has become a very important part of our culture change programme for the future."



Tutor Peter Daniels working with Dave Mukherjee (right) in the onsite learning centre

Conclusions



The case studies in this booklet show how learning agreements between management and unions can add significant value to an organisation by establishing workplace learning centres, paid time off to learn and support for union learning representatives.

All these outcomes have widened the scope of learning opportunities in the workplaces but, more importantly, actual take-up has been high because:

- ▶ learning needs analyses established what courses workers wanted,
- ▶ senior management demonstrated strong commitment
- ▶ ULRs were trained to encourage and support their members.

Whereas industrial relations in all the organisations have sometimes been difficult in the past, working together on training and development has helped improve trust and communication between management and unions and also led to greater collaboration between unions.

The Union Learning Fund projects have supported the learning activity in all three workplaces. But these initiatives must be continued and developed once the projects are completed, and learning agreements are a powerful means of delivering such sustainability.

Learning agreements can emerge out of a long history of joint work on training (as at Siemens and VT Shipbuilding) or they can also help organisations kick-start a fully-integrated strategy from a relatively low base (as at Merseytravel). But in all cases, agreements can help companies meet both the job-specific and wider learning needs of the workforce.

While the agreements are formal, the bargaining process over training is not adversarial, like traditional pay bargaining. But it is much more than mere consultation on how management are going to train staff.

Instead, the partnership approach to delivery is integrative, consensual, co-operative and based on mutual trust: it's about management and unions:

- ▶ jointly identifying a problem (eg, using learning needs analysis)
- ▶ searching for solutions (eg, with the help of union learning representatives)
- ▶ selecting a way forward (eg, establishing learning centres and time off to train in them).

These examples of good practice could be the norm in many more workplaces if there were far more learning agreements with employers.

That's why training needs to be given its rightful place as a core issue for negotiation in union-recognised organisations, establishing a sustainable learning culture in workplaces throughout the UK.

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