

unionlearn

Unionlearn Strategy for Supporting Learners (IAG) (2008 – 2011)

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1. Introduction:

This strategy has been developed to support the delivery of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services to union learners until March 2011. It aims to further build upon the progress made to develop and mainstream a unionlearn model for Supporting Learners (IAG) that has until recently been supported by EQUAL funding.

The term Supporting Learners, rather IAG, has been adopted and is used throughout this strategy as it is more meaningful and understandable when describing the activities of most ULRs unless ULRs have undertaken NVQs and are working in a matrix accredited situation.

2. Purpose:

The purpose of this strategy is to further embed and mainstream the unionlearn model for Supporting Learners (IAG) within unionlearn, affiliated unions and IAG providers both nationally and regionally, taking into account other unionlearn development projects and recognising and working with regional variations.

3. Background:

Unionlearn is the TUC's learning and skills organisation and as such contributes to the overall TUC strategic and operational plans. This strategy is closely aligned to the three year Strategic Plan (2006-2009) for unionlearn where the focus is on the following the six objectives:

Reps and unions:

1. To ensure that unionlearn contributes to the growth of unions and the number of reps
2. To develop quality services that support the union contribution to learning and skills in the workplace
3. To develop strategies for the sustainability of this work

Learners:

4. To help unions increase the number of union learners, in all types of learning
5. To develop quality tools and support services for unions to use with union learners which promote progression
6. To develop sustainable strategies and frameworks for union learners

The following research, undertaken over a two year period to December 2007, has informed the development of this strategy:

- Development of discussion paper to propose IAG delivery models for the emerging 'Union Academy' funded by TUC EQUAL
- A Department for Education and Skills (DfES) mapping project that explored the relationship and role of ULRs with other work-based intermediaries
- A Skillset project that bench-marked the progress made to date by the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and unions working together to provide IAG services to union learners
- A research and consultation project to underpin the unionlearn IAG model and strategy which has been funded by TUC EQUAL to develop 'New Guidance Services'

Copies of the various research reports can be accessed from the Supporting Learners area of the unionlearn website by following the links to 'Research Reports'.

Key achievements during 2007 in terms of implementing a unionlearn model for Supporting Learners include:

- Setting up the unionlearn learning and careers advice service
- Tailored backup and support for union reps from Careers Advice
- The inclusion of Supporting Learners theme, with suggested projects, in the Union Learning Fund (ULF) criteria
- Improved union rep training through providing revised training materials and activities
- Improved resources for union reps and ULRs
- A Supporting Learners area on the unionlearn website
- Strong and active links with the national 'network' of IAG providers
- A range of effective practice case studies
- The convening of a Working Group of unionlearn IAG specialists from the regions
- Examples of how the strategy works with disadvantaged groups
- Attracted attention in EU and national conferences and provided an inspiration to unions in other countries

4. The unionlearn model for Supporting Learners:

The unionlearn model for Supporting Learners is based on the network model which builds on active working relationships with IAG providers and recognises that ULRs need to engage with a range of agencies in order to find the information they need to help their members, and to broker workplace opportunities effectively. This model builds on existing good practice in unions and unionlearn regions.

ULRs are at the centre of the network model as they carry out an important role in supporting union members in making choices about learning and taking up learning opportunities that are right for them. A recent survey of union learners carried out by unionlearn showed that learners regard their ULR as the first port of call for information and advice about learning, and would prefer to have initial discussions with a trusted intermediary in their union rather than their employer or any outside agency.

The activities that most ULRs are engaged in, on a voluntary basis, to support learners are best described as identifying needs, mentoring, coaching and signposting both to opportunities and to other services. They have a major role to play in building confidence and promoting access.

The key features of the unionlearn model for Supporting Learners are:

- Central role of the ULR, in supporting, coaching, mentoring and signposting
- Working with a range of agencies who can offer services to union learners
- Agreements and joint actions for working together with the network
- Standards of service that union learners can expect of these partners
- Access to information and advice and resources for union reps, ULRs and union learners through the unionlearn learning & careers advice service

Key members of the network are:

- The ULR and other union reps
- The unionlearn learning and careers advice service
- Unionlearn and other workplace learning centres
- Other learning and training providers (Adult Further and Higher Education)
- Nextstep face-to-face services
- Employers
- Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)

The role of unionlearn is to take the strategic responsibility for supporting the work of the ULR and the network in which they are operating. It has never been intended that unionlearn will be a direct deliverer of IAG services except through embedded services provided through TUC Education and unionlearn centres.

The unionlearn network model for Supporting Learners is dependent on good relationships with others in the network and there are likely to be significant changes during the coming years as the new adult advancement and careers service is piloted in readiness for it being operational in 2010. The TUC is keen to have a strategic role in the development and implementation of the new service, alongside the work of unionlearn in assisting unions and ULRs to play an effective role.

5. Embedding the unionlearn model for Supporting Learners:

This section describes the present situation and outlines actions required to maintain the good progress made and to further embed IAG within unionlearn.

5.1 Support and CPD for ULF project managers and workers:

A Supporting Learners theme with suggested projects for unions to undertake was developed with the Union Learning Fund (ULF) team and included in the ULF Prospectus - Round 11 issued in September 2007. The ULF proposals have been reviewed by the project worker and comments about the efficacy of the Supporting Learners themes passed to the ULF team for action.

Unions seeking *matrix* accreditation will be assisted by ULF. Unionlearn will work closely with ENTO to support unions in meeting the standard.

Planned actions:

- Develop closer links with individual unions through ULF project workers, encouraging the use and customisation of unionlearn materials and services for supporting learners
- Provide specialist briefings and support for ULF project managers to ensure that projects support learners at all levels
- Develop and pilot an appropriate CPD programme for project managers and workers to ensure that they are using all available resources effectively to support learners, and are aware of progression routes and how to access them
- Make sure that all unions are aware of the range of Supporting Learners activity and resources in unionlearn and are using the latter wherever possible
- Make sure that unions have information and the support if they need it if they are working towards *matrix* accreditation.

5.2 Resources and materials for ULRs:

Unionlearn, working with Careers Advice, launched a new learning and careers advice service in June 2007 to support ULRs. ULRs and other reps can call a dedicated number to access the full range of services offered by learndirect Careers made via the unionlearn website.

A Supporting Learners series of guides for ULRs and other reps was launched in December 2007. Copies of the guides, which can be customised by unions, can be ordered or downloaded from the unionlearn website.

The union learning Climbing Frame is an electronic tool for ULRs and other union reps that can be accessed from the unionlearn website. It holds information about a range of learning themes and opportunities that can be updated and continuously developed. Members can be signposted to relevant learning opportunities whatever their skill levels.

Planned actions:

- Carry out a short feasibility study to find out what additional resources ULRs need, and evaluate the use of resources produced in the EQUAL Supporting Learners project.
- Develop new resources as identified above, and update existing resources (new resources required may include Supporting Learners Guides on Redundancy Support, Supporting Migrant Workers, Supporting Higher Level Learners, Supporting Older Workers)
- Convene the union consultative group as appropriate and obtain their feedback on new materials and resources
- Develop a fully web-based version of the Climbing Frame
- Develop the content of the Climbing Frame as the new adult advancement and careers service develops
- Promote the use of the Climbing Frame as one of a range of tools for Supporting Learners available to ULRs.

5.3 Training and development for union reps

Unionlearn has a key role to play in providing relevant training and development opportunities to ULRs and project workers to enable union learners to receive appropriate support.

New skills based training modules and materials have been developed and it is intended that these replace the existing IAG Module that is available to ULRs. These will be delivered by TUC Education or adapted by unions, and offered as options to accompany the five day basic ULR training.

The new NOCN accredited training modules that cover Supporting Learners, Mentoring and Recording progress with Learners are currently being piloted by TUC Education tutors and selected unions.

Some ULRs and project workers have and may wish in the future to access IAG progression routes in order to develop themselves to take on a more specialist role. Some ULRs and project workers have NVQs and NOCN qualifications in IAG.

Planned actions:

- Promote the new range of specialist modules which are currently being piloted
- Assist in the revision of basic training for reps when TUC Education does this to include the Supporting Learners dimension
- Review the role of TUC Education tutors in delivering the Supporting Learners strategy and in assisting reps to progress further in this area, and help to produce a framework and materials for CPD in this area
- Contribute to the development of materials to support ULRs who are able to access NVQs and other qualifications about gathering and presenting evidence; unions with ULF projects about this theme would benefit from this
- Maintain relationships with the main professional organisations, e.g. National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA), Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) for ULRs and project workers wishing to specialise in IAG to facilitate access to opportunities including training, CPD and information services.

5.4 Develop and support the Supporting Learners network:

Relationships between unionlearn and IAG network providers have been strengthened both nationally and regionally. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and joint agreements and action plans are being maintained and progressed with Careers Advice, nextstep services (both nationally and regionally) and the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), who, with the relevant unions, are exploring effective ways of providing Labour Market Information and careers advice. Other partners include local IAG and learning providers, including those who have achieved the unionlearn Quality Award for some of their programmes. In this way unionlearn and unions are actively networking on behalf of union members.

In looking to address the local and regional differences in terms of how nextstep services and unions are working together to the benefit of union learners, some regionally based workshops with nextstep services have taken place. Further work is required to make sure that nextstep contractors are fully aware of the best ways of working with unions and with unionlearn. ULRs also need to be clear about the support that nextstep can offer them and union learners.

Planned actions:

- Maintain and further develop the network to maintain and develop MOUs and joint action plans and projects with Careers Advice, SSCs and nextstep and develop new agreements with other agencies as appropriate
- Adjust existing action plans as the new adult advancement and careers service develops
- Participate in joint bids for funding for projects, e.g. further work with SSCs on Labour Market Information and other relevant joint approaches between SSCs and unions.

5.5 Disseminating and sharing good practice:

An internal Regional Working Group was convened in May to help embed and mainstream the unionlearn strategy for Supporting Learners (IAG) in the regions for the benefit of unions, ULRs and union learners.

The group meets bi-monthly and comprises of unionlearn staff with an interest in supporting union learners through information, advice and guidance (IAG) both nationally and regionally.

Consultation and dissemination has been ongoing throughout the various research and consultation stages of the Supporting Learners Equal project and in a range and variety of settings.

Some regions are continuing to develop their own strategies and models for Supporting Learners.

A number of new case studies from a range of settings have been obtained and are available on the unionlearn website in the Supporting Learners area and the central database of case studies.

Planned actions:

- Continue to service and develop the Regional Working Group
- Continue to actively support regional activity as appropriate
- Develop and disseminate more case studies within the database, particularly in supporting specific groups of union learners, and in access to Higher Level Learning.
- Identify if funding can be obtained to research and write an academic report about the role of union reps in supporting learners and promoting career development.

Internal dissemination will take place through:

- unionlearn national events, e.g. ULF conference
- unionlearn regional events and conferences
- Affiliated union events, e.g. ULR conferences and forums

External dissemination will take place through:

- The IAG network
- Conference presentations and workshops

Materials and case studies that illustrate good practice will be made available on:

- The unionlearn website and case study database
- Regional publications and newsletters
- Central publications, e.g. The Learner Rep magazine

5.6 Communications:

Two way communications between unionlearn, key stakeholders and affiliates will be essential for this strategy to succeed. It will be important to continue representing the work of unionlearn and unions in Supporting Learners in IAG and career guidance contexts and to, where possible, encourage collaborative working arrangements.

The Information, Advice and Guidance area on the unionlearn website was replaced with a Supporting Learners area in September 2007. Union reps and ULRs can now access to a range of information and free downloadable resources to help them to support members.

The unionlearn model for Supporting Learners has been widely publicised through internal and external publications.

Planned actions:

- Maintain links with a range of external guidance-related organisations including the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA), Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG) and the National Institute of Careers Education Counselling (NICEC) to promote workplace activities and to disseminate information and good practice into the wider guidance field.
- Review and update the Supporting Learners area of the website every six months
- Produce or comment on copy for publications including journals, magazines and reports
- Respond and react promptly to communications from unions, unionlearn staff, learners and external agencies.

Future developments in the unionlearn model for Supporting Learners will be communicated to:

- unionlearn staff
- Affiliated unions
- Providers in the network
- Other appropriate external agencies
- Key stakeholders.

through a range of media that will include:

- Attendance at external events to ensure position in the network is maintained and developed
- Presentations at meetings and conferences
- Briefings
- Web alerts.

6. Equality and diversity:

All quality assured IAG practice is based on values and principles which are consistent with themes running through all TUC and unionlearn activities, including equality and diversity and impartiality.

The EQUAL project has supported innovative ways to promote and facilitate equal opportunities in workplace learning and empower learners to gain the skills they require to enhance career progression.

It will be important post-EQUAL to make sure that there are consistent strategies for learners at all levels.

Planned action:

- Review and monitor activities to ensure this strategy is implemented in line with unionlearn principles for equality and diversity
- Dovetail the unionlearn Supporting Learners and Higher Level Learning strategies to ensure a consistent plan to support learners at all levels of progression

- Ensure that all materials and resources produced post-EQUAL (including Climbing Frame content) promote a coherent unionlearn approach to learner progression
- Work with relevant unions to ensure that members wishing to progress towards higher level learning have appropriate information, advice and guidance.

7. Evaluation:

Embedding the Supporting Learners strategy:

The Standards and Quality Manager has the day-to-day management responsibility for mainstreaming IAG through the implementation of this strategy.

The Senior Management Team (SMT) will be updated on progress by the Standards and Quality Manager at their monthly meeting where they review and monitor the strategic direction of unionlearn.

Learner and ULR feedback:

Evaluative data is gathered from learners and ULRs from a variety of sources within and external to unionlearn. Currently there is not a formal mechanism for gathering feedback about the impact of any information, advice and guidance (IAG) received by union learners.

The following is a summary of known evaluative activity:

- All union learners and ULRs undertaking a TUC Education programme complete an evaluation questionnaire both mid and at the end of the course. Sample evaluation questionnaires are included in Passport to Progress. TUC Regional Education Officers are responsible for quality assurance in their regions and receive all the evaluation forms from providers and deal with any issues locally.
- Unions delivering Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects gather evaluative feedback from learners at the end of a course
- Members and ULRs accessing the unionlearn learning and careers advice service agree to enter a client follow up system operated by Careers Advice. An independent research organisation selects and follows up a sample of callers within six months of their initial contact to ascertain the usefulness of the service and any action taken.
- The initial union learning climbing frame pilots (Usdaw, PCS and Prospect) provided useful feedback that influenced the development of this resource. There is not currently a mechanism for gathering evaluative feedback from ULRs and learners using the climbing frame
- Feedback about the added value of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service is not currently gathered from affiliates
- Union learners accessing nextstep services either from a workplace or a union learning centre are followed up within six months by their local nextstep contractor to find out how the information and advice about learning and work has been used
- ULRs and others are invited to provide feedback about the resources that have been developed to help support learners, for example, the Supporting Learners Guides invite comment back to the Standards & Quality Manager

External evaluation:

- External evaluation of the Supporting Learners project is part of the suite of activities being undertaken through the TUC EQUAL Highroad project
- External evaluation projects are commissioned by regional staff usually as required by the funding organisation, for example, a local Learning & Skills Council.
- The Research & Strategy Manager commissions external research and evaluations

Planned actions:

Embedding the Supporting Learners strategy:

- This strategy will be reviewed quarterly by the Standards and Quality Manager and updated as appropriate to take into account the new adult advancement and careers service.

Learner and ULR feedback:

In planning for and implementing a system of gathering evaluative feedback from learners about the support they have received it will be important to ensure duplication of any current activity is avoided nor that perceived added layers of bureaucracy are introduced.

- Identify and review a sample of evaluative questionnaires issued to learners to determine whether sufficient information relating to how learners are being supported, including embedded IAG, is being gathered
- Recommend amendments or additions to evaluative questionnaires already in use so that information relating to how learners are being supported and receiving information and advice about their learning and work options is gathered
- Negotiate with Careers Advice to access client tracking information gathered from ULRs and learners about the added value of the unionlearn learning & careers advice service
- Contribute to the development of a web-based questionnaire enabling feedback about the union learning climbing frame to be gathered from ULRs and learners. Encourage affiliates to customise the questionnaire and to provide unionlearn with a summary of responses. Use an online survey and focus groups to obtain evaluative feedback that will inform the future development of the climbing frame
- Consider the feasibility, particularly in terms of resource implications, of introducing an independent tracking system to try to establish how advice provided is being used when volumes increase
- Explore the potential for using the online Officers Community as a facility for gathering feedback from affiliates about the added value of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service when volumes increase
- Develop a short questionnaire for unions, in particular those delivering ULF projects, to use to find out if members are satisfied with the support (IAG) they have received
- Review any feedback received from ULRs about the Supporting Learners Guides and revise the materials annually as appropriate
- Send out an email alert to ULRs annually to invite their feedback about materials and resources made to help them to support union learners

External evaluation:

- Review and use the findings from the TUC evaluation of EQUAL to improve services developed under the Supporting Learners project

- Review and use the findings from external evaluation projects to ensure that learners are getting the help they need and to inform future development
 - Liaise with the Research & Strategy Manager to identify if sufficient funding is available to commission an evaluation project to identify how much the Supporting Learners strategy has been embedded by unions.

8. Sustainability:

The network of ULRs is both unique and substantial within the delivery structure of IAG in terms of providing front-line support to learners, but as volunteers not as paid representatives of agencies who are in receipt of dedicated public funds, for example, nextstep networks.

The Standards and Quality Manager and Senior Management Team will need to consider negotiating post-EQUAL sources of funding to sustain and further mainstream the unionlearn model for Supporting Learners in 2008 and beyond.

The TUC wants to have a strategic role in the development and implementation of the new adult advancement and careers service. Involvement in proposed pilot activity will help unionlearn and its affiliates to appropriately position themselves in readiness for the launch of the new service.

As the unionlearn model for Supporting Learners has attracted attention in the EU and provided an inspiration to unions in other countries there is potential for project work with EU partners to be secured to enable additional resources for ULRs and reps to be developed.

Planned action:

- Initiate high-level discussions with DIUS to ensure unionlearn and union involvements in the new service
- Negotiate with DIUS and the LSC for funds to support the mainstreaming and ongoing development of unionlearn IAG services
- Promote the future role of unionlearn and unions with DIUS and the LSC
- Seek opportunities to assist in trialling the role of unionlearn and unions in the new adult advancement and careers service if DIUS/LSC include them, including testing the role in workless/in work interface
- Provide briefings and support for unionlearn staff and regions, and unions to ensure that they informed about new developments as they happen and are taking a consistent approach and accessing appropriate sources of funding.
- Take forward IAG and careers project ideas submitted for further EU funding if bids successful
- Identify and bid for any specialist funding sources which will assist unionlearn in implementing the Supporting Learners strategy.

unionlearn

unionlearn
Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS

www.unionlearn.org.uk

Contact:
Ian Borkett
020 7079 6940
iborkett@tuc.org.uk

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