

# Union impact on learning and skills

The statistical evidence; Facts and Stats

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## Information Sources

Findlay, J., Findlay, P., and Warhurst, C. (2007) Estimating the Demand for Union-led Learning in Scotland. Research Paper 6, London: unionlearn.

Stuart, M. and Robinson, A. (2007) Training, union recognition and collective bargaining: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey: Research Paper 4. London: unionlearn.

Unionlearn and the Open University (2007) Learning unlimited: a survey of union members and higher education opportunities: London: unionlearn.

Unionlearn (2009) Year 3 Moving Learning On. London: unionlearn.

## Demand for union supported learning

Almost all (91 percent) of union members responding to a unionlearn/Open University survey felt they would always keep on learning to make sure that their knowledge and skills were up to date (unionlearn/Open University, 2007).

Over two-thirds (67 percent) of union respondents were planning to undertake such learning the next year, with 71 percent hoping to undertake such opportunities in the next 5 years (unionlearn/Open University, 2007).

Over half of respondents (51.9 percent) to a survey of union members in Scotland stated that learning organised through a union would increase their likelihood of undertaking learning (Findlay et al. 2007).

Individuals who say they are more likely to take up learning if it is provided through their unions are 2.5 times more likely to have a clear intention to learn than those who don't (Findlay et al. 2007).

## **Barriers and incentives to union learners**

Six in ten (59 percent) of the respondents to the unionlearn/Open University survey felt they would find it difficult to get paid time off work from their employer and 81 percent would be interested to learn if the employer provided the time (unionlearn/Open University, 2007).

Almost a half (47 percent) could not afford course fees but would be interested to learn if their employer paid the fees or part of them (unionlearn/Open University, 2007).

One in four were not confident that they had the study skills to take up a course and a third were not sure that taking a course would improve their career opportunities. But almost half stated that they would be interested to learn if they were supported by a colleague or a union rep trained to advise on learning (unionlearn/Open University, 2007).

Whereas four in five respondents experienced sessions in large groups less than one in ten preferred this method. A half would prefer sessions in a small group and 22 percent would prefer a combination of methods of delivery (unionlearn/Open University, 2007).

## **Union recognition, negotiation and training**

Employees in union recognised workplaces are 8.1 per cent more likely to receive training (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

There has been a threefold increase in negotiation over training from 3.3 per cent to 9.2 per cent between 1998 and 2004 (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

This has resulted in a decrease in employer consultation from 36.9 percent to 30.5 percent,

with the proportion of management informing their workforce virtually unchanged – from 23.9 percent to 24.3 per cent. The stubborn statistic is that 36 percent of managers still do not even inform their employees about training (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

Where a union is not recognised, as many as 22.9 percent of managers report that no time has been spent on training, compared to just 5.9 percent with their union recognised counterparts (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

Where a union is recognised, managers reported that 34.6 percent of employees received 5 or more training days in the last 12 months compared to 23.4 per cent in non - unionised workplaces (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

Where unions are recognised and negotiate over training, employees are 23.9 percent more likely to report having received some training in the last 12 months (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

## **Union Learning Representative impact**

Over 23,000 ULRs have been trained since 1999 and they are having impact on the coverage of training. Where a workplace has ULRs, recognition and employee representatives, employees are 14.9 percent more likely to report receiving training. Where there are recognised unions but no employee representatives then the probability of receiving training is far less – 8.6 percent (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

ULRs also have impact on the incidence of training. Where there is a ULR, 46.5 percent of employees received 5 or more training days in the last 12 months compared to 29.2 percent in workplaces where there is no ULR (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

There is more negotiation over training in workplaces with a ULR (13.1 percent) compared to those with union representatives as a whole (9.2 percent) and especially those with non-union representatives (1.7 percent) (Stuart and Robinson, 2007).

Almost three quarters (73 percent) of ULR respondents to the unionlearn ULR and employer survey stated that they had a positive impact on some form of training. ULRs had particular impact on learning not funded by the employer (Bacon and Hoque 2009). These included the following types of learning:

- Training towards qualifications – 42 percent
- Personal interest/leisure courses – 41 percent
- Basic literacy and numeracy courses – 39 percent

Managers reported the following ULR activity in their workplace:

- Raising awareness of the benefits of training – 79 percent
- Arranging any type of training for employees – 68 percent
- Increasing the participation of no-traditional learners in training – 64 percent
- Increasing overall employee demand for training – 63 percent
- Offering advice to managers on training issues – 47 percent
- Identifying individuals; training needs – 46 percent

A half of managers felt that ULRs had a positive impact on some form of training. 61 percent stated that ULRs have contributed towards addressing skills gaps with 37 percent stating that they have contributed towards improved

organisational efficiency and productivity (Bacon and Hoque 2009).

## Unionlearn impact

From April 2008 – March 2009 as many as 220,199 learners were supported by their union through unionlearn. Almost a half of these union learners - 113,275 - were supported through Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects (unionlearn Annual Report, 2009). The main learner outcomes of ULF projects for the year were as follows:

- 24,445 Skills for Life
- 22,129 ICT
- 20,784 CPD
- 16,398 NVQ Level2/3
- 16,229 FE

Other ULF outcomes include:

- 2,329 apprenticeships supported
- 99 learning centres opened
- 225 Skills Pledges with employers covering 6,716 workplaces
- 210 learning agreements with employers covering 1,613 workplaces

The effectiveness of union learning is dependent on the knowledge and understanding of union reps and professionals. The Trade Union Education figures for 2008 show an increase of 9.6% on 2007's record-breaking year, with 57,657 union workplace representatives and 1,424 union professionals accessing training

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