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Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund Rounds 15-16 and Support Role of Unionlearn

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Executive Summary

In June 2015, the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at the University of Leeds, in collaboration with the Marchmont Observatory at the University of Exeter, were commissioned by TUC/unionlearn, to conduct an evaluation of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) Rounds 15 and 16. Across these two rounds, covering the periods 2012/13 to 2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively, a total of £45.6 million was distributed to 41 unions and staff associations running 78 projects. The objectives of the evaluation were to evaluate the extent to which ULF projects met their stated objectives, the role of unionlearn in supporting delivery of the ULF programme, the economic impact of ULF and impact on learners, workplaces and unions. The evaluation also explored the key challenges and lessons learnt by unions and interviewed national stakeholders. Finally, the evaluation team were asked to suggest practical measures for developing future evaluations that can provide a robust analysis of longer term outcomes.

The evaluation study has included a mix of qualitative, quantitative and secondary data analysis, integrating different perspectives to ensure that the analysis of the ULF is rigorous, balanced and reliable. A survey of 2,550 learners took place in January-March 2016 that included the follow-up of 228 learners previously surveyed in early 2015. In addition, a survey of 385 employers took place at the end of 2015 and this is compared to data from a similar survey undertaken by CERIC in 2010¹. Group and one-to-one interviews were held with 22 union officers and 12 non-union national stakeholders. ULF monitoring data was also analysed. The evaluation criteria focused on the following: the range of learning activities that the ULF supports; value for money indicators; how unions promote and broker access to learning and make learning inclusive; how learners progress; and, impacts at the workplace, in unions and the wider economy.

The scale and nature of ULF activity

Since the ULF began in 1998, union learners have taken part in over 1.45 million learning episodes². Across Rounds 15 and 16, ULF supported learners took part in over 533,000 learning episodes. Of those learners surveyed, a third had taken part in one episode only, 52% in three to six episodes and a fifth in more than six. Repeat learning matters when looking at outcomes.

ULF projects continue to support learners to access a wide range of learning activities from literacy and numeracy to higher levels skills. However, there is now a stronger emphasis on functional skills (notably maths), vocational qualifications and apprenticeships reflecting current skills strategy priorities of the government. The annual ULF allocation reduced from £20.2 million in 2012/13 to £14 million in 2015/16, a fall of £6.2 million (-30%). Unionlearn absorbed much of the funding reduction, scaling back activity by £4.4 million, so that the average reduction in funding to ULF projects over this period was 15 per cent.

¹ https://lubswww.leeds.ac.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Cericpolicy_report_4_unionlearn_01.pdf

² This covers a wide range of learning activity from formal direct courses, to on-line and more informal learning and advice sessions. Appendix 3 shows a full list of learning types reported.

ULF projects exceeded almost all targets set for them in terms of learning activity and some targets were exceeded by a significant margin. This was most notable for measures such as the number of learning episodes; number of functional skills learners; number of learners on FE programmes; and number of learner support referrals. Apprenticeship targets were slightly above target in Round 15 and slightly below target for Round 16.

The value for money of the ULF has improved considerably over time, with an average cost per learning episode of £81 in 2016 against an average of £164 for the first 10 rounds of the ULF or £142 for Rounds 1-14 of the ULF. On average, ULF projects did not meet targets set for building learning 'infrastructure' or employer and provider engagement. This was notable in terms of measures for the: number of ULRs trained; learners on HE programmes; number of learning agreements signed; and, number of partnership agreements with providers. These were all below target.

Accessibility and inclusion

The ULF supports learning that is inclusive. It helps break down barriers to learning through negotiating with employers on time for learning, getting access to learning resources and building learner confidence through peer-to-peer support. Union learning notably engaged older workers and learners from minority ethnic groups. ULF activity engaged learners from across the occupational spectrum with a third in managerial or professional roles. A fifth (22%) of union learners were in operative roles, compared to an average 5 per cent of the unionised workforce in occupational roles. The proportion of union learners with no formal prior qualification was 12 per cent. This is four times higher than the average across unionised workplaces (3%).

More than half of learners (51%) reported time as being a barrier to learning. A significant minority (41%) of learners reported a lack of management interest and support as a barrier to their learning. The learner survey confirmed that ULR support (52%), information from union events (25%) and promotional materials (20%) were the key ways that learners become engaged in union learning activities.

Progression and employability

Union learners gain qualifications at all levels: 24 per cent at Level 3 or higher; 47 per cent at Level 2; and 3 per cent at Entry level and Level 1. Many learners improve their qualification levels and those with no prior qualifications or lower levels of prior qualifications are those most likely to gain. One in five learners (19%) achieved a higher level of qualification and this figure is much higher for those with less formal education.

Over two-thirds (68%) of learners with no previous qualification and just under half (47%) of those starting with Entry level or Level 1 qualifications got a qualification at a higher level as a result of ULF support.

Union learning stimulates demand for further learning. Three quarters (76%) reported that they had become more enthusiastic about learning, and nine in ten (91%) that they were interested in further learning. Eight in ten (81%) wanted to do more union learning. However, a much smaller proportion (52%) thought they would have opportunities to get training in the future. This suggests an unmet demand for learning.

Union learning helps workers build their confidence as learners and to develop work-related skills. Four-fifths (80%) of learners felt that union learning had given them skills that were useful in their current job; and the same proportion agreed they had developed skills that could be transferred into a new job. Nearly two thirds (62%) of learners said their learning helped them do their job better.

One in five union learners report gaining a promotion or increased responsibility at work, 13 per cent report that they had stayed in a job that they might otherwise have lost, 7 per cent got a new job and 11 per cent received a pay rise as a result of union learning. Multilevel regression analysis³ found that repeated episodes of union learning resulted in more positive outcomes than a single episode. This was significant for the extent to which learners got a new job with their current employer (3.6 times more likely); received a pay rise (2.7 times); attained promotion (5.7 times) or reported that they could do their job more effectively (3.4 times).

Productivity and organisational performance

Employers find that union learning contributes to a wide range of organisational benefits and perceived benefits appeared to have increased since 2010. Just under half (43%) report that union learning contributes to an increased take-up of job-related training. Over three-quarters of employers (77%) report a positive return on the investment they make when supporting ULRs and union learning. Eleven per cent of employers reported that employees were more likely to get a pay rise as a result of union learning and just under half of employers agreed that learning activities would not have taken place without external union funding.

A third of employers (32%) report that organisational performance has increased as a result of union learning and nearly half (47%) that employee commitment has improved. More than four in ten employers (44%) said that union learning led to an improvement in union-management relationships. Higher levels of training were more likely to be associated with the presence of a learning agreement and greater employer investment. Key factors affecting the degree of impact of training were the existence of a learning centre and where employers valued the ULF⁴. The survey also finds, however, that while support structures (such as learning agreements and committees) and the presence of bargaining on this theme lead to better outcomes, the proportion of employers reporting investment in these structures has declined since 2010.

Economic Impact

The economic impact assessment shows that union learning makes an estimated net contribution to the economy of £1,452 million. For every £1 invested in the ULF there is a return to the economy of £12.30, of which £7.60 accrues to the individual and £4.70 to the employer. So-called 'deadweight' for union learning (i.e. those learners reporting they would have undertaken the learning without the support of the union) was low. Deadweight was reported by between 13 per cent and 17 per cent of learners.

³ See section 5.1 for an explanation.

⁴ In some cases, employers are not aware that ULF funding supports union-led workplace learning activity. Where they are aware some employers value the existence of the ULF more than others.

The Exchequer benefits from union learning in many ways. However, the impact model used in this evaluation (explained in Appendix 5) focuses on the income tax, national insurance and VAT benefits that accrue to the Treasury as a result of the increased earning capacity of ULF learners. The return to the Exchequer of gains made by Round 16 learners is estimated at £420m. Taking into account the cost of delivering Round 16 the estimated return to the Exchequer is £3.57 for each £1 spent.

Impact on unions

Twenty per cent of the learners surveyed were not union members before they started learning with the union, and almost half (46.2%) became a union member as a result of their experience. A third of all union learners reported becoming more active in their union. Again, a higher number of learning episodes are associated with these union-related outcomes: becoming more involved in the union (11.3x more likely) and becoming a ULR (26.2x more likely).

Challenges and lessons learnt

The process by which unions apply for funding has become more robust. For example, funding decisions are now taken by an assessment panel that includes senior union officers and an independent chair. The strong performance in terms of the delivery of learning outputs and the increased value for money indicators suggest that the delivery of the ULF activities has improved and is increasingly effective. The action learning sets conducted with 22 ULF project managers gave useful insights into key delivery challenges and solutions.

There has been an increased focus on monitoring and reporting, coupled with a decline in ULF funding for administrative support and as a consequence project managers report spending more time on administrative activity rather than partnership and capacity building. This appears to be reflected in the ULF output data. There was a perceived reduction in operational support from unionlearn, notably regional expertise and intelligence that informs partnership development with suitable providers and in sharing practice across unions. Despite this, project workers were supportive of the role played by unionlearn.

Interviews with national stakeholders included policy, educational and employers' bodies. Stakeholders considered the union role as unique and one that contributes added value in the following areas: in terms of engagement with employers and employees; capacity to operate across levels (workplace, sector, national); in providing learning brokerage through knowing what is needed at the workplace; through advocating for learner (and workplace) needs and in upholding training standards. Tensions arise from low levels of understanding by those in stakeholder organisations of unions in general and how union learning operates in practice. Lower levels of engagement from unionlearn than in the past were noted by some stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) Review the annual funding settlement to develop longer-term projects – One year projects have a limiting effect on the wider efficacy of ULF projects. Shorter projects focus attention towards the drafting of bids and less towards innovation and relationship building with employers, providers and harder-to-reach groups. While unions are able to focus on achieving short courses and functional skills, more episodes of learning undertaken lead to more beneficial outcomes for learners and organisations. Success in attaining progression and higher level qualifications requires a longer-time frame for project duration.

(2) Review the key policy imperatives in terms of skills targets – ULF projects exceeded target against key areas on functional skills and apprenticeships, however, an excessive focus on these areas is limiting for the ULF as a whole. In some cases, leading professional unions have looked to pull away from the ULF, as this focus does not align with the learning needs in the workplaces in which they operate. Yet, wider stakeholders note that unions have a unique role to play in attracting learning in all contexts, in ways that employers may not be able to do. While the emphasis on functional skills and apprenticeships is likely to remain, the ULF should encourage bids from unions operating in a wide range of contexts, some of which are specific to certain unions: engaging this broad range of unions, learners and employers is a key feature of the ULF in underpinning a core principle of learning opportunity for all.

(3) Improve and integrate project monitoring, reporting and project evaluation systems – The degree of monitoring of ULF projects has increased but this mainly reports outputs, not broader outcomes. Better quality data on learners and employers is needed to track outcomes and assess overall impact. New data initiatives are underway, but the success of this will depend on changes in the approach taken by unions and unionlearn. There are three related recommendations. Firstly, to develop an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework setting out the approach, measures and roles of all parties including unions, unionlearn, providers and evaluators⁵. Secondly, monitoring and evaluation should be embedded at the project level, detailed in bid guidance and costed appropriately so that projects are able to provide data on learners and employers using shared protocols to ensure confidentiality and enable independent follow-up over time. Thirdly, a working group of unions, unionlearn, DfE and stakeholders should work jointly to agree this framework.

(4) Enhance the sharing of intelligence and good practice across ULF projects – ULF project leads and unionlearn note that the sharing of intelligence and best practice across projects is limited. Much can be gained (and costs potentially saved) by sharing challenges, good practice and lessons learnt. Formal networks across projects should be established at the outset of each funding round, with the expectation of networking activity by project managers, again appropriately costed. The resource needed by unionlearn to help facilitate this needs to be reviewed.

⁵ A proposal is outlined in Appendix 6.

(5) Review the balance between output delivery and sustainability – While the policy emphasis on certain learning outcomes is understandable, the ability of unions to successfully deliver learning requires wider activity to take place such as training ULRs and developing workplace structures (e.g. learning centres, committees and agreements) that help to ensure meaningful dialogue and engagement takes place with employers and providers. These contribute positively to impact at the workplace level. Yet, these support structures appear to have declined. Part of the reason lies in the changes to the funding structure, direction and emphasis. Renewed emphasis is needed on rebuilding ULR training and networks and in engaging more widely with employers and providers. This requires the wider support of individual unions, unionlearn, employers and provider bodies. Such activity should be encouraged by DfE. The unionlearn team and Board need to continue to develop dialogue across the union movement and with wider stakeholders including providers, government and employer bodies on the best way for unionlearn to support this activity.

1 Introduction: union learning and the ULF

1.1 Overview

This report sets out the findings of an evaluation of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) rounds 15 and 16. It reports findings from two surveys of employers and learners, supported by supplementary data from ULF programme and project management information supplied by unionlearn, feedback from ULF project managers and a small sample of wider stakeholders. This introductory section provides background to the evaluation in terms of the context of union learning and the ULF, including previous evaluations of the fund. It then sets out the aims and objectives of the evaluation and approach that was adopted.

1.2 Background to unions and workplace learning

Since 1998, unions (in England) have been able to apply for financial support from the government backed Union Learning Fund (ULF) and have attained statutory rights for a new workplace representative, the Union Learning Representative (ULR). These developments marked a new phase in union activity around workplace learning and skills and stood in contrast to the period of the 1980s and early 1990s when the union voice was progressively excluded from institutional arrangements such as Industrial Training Boards and the emphasis on employer-led decision-making structures on training increased (Rainbird 1990; Heyes & Stuart 1998).

Despite their exclusion during the 1980s and 1990s, unions had sought to engage more strategically with the training agenda (Leisink 1993; Rainbird 1990). This found expression in the early 1990s around the promotion of workplace training committees by individual unions and the Trades Union Congress's (TUC) statement of bargaining priorities for the 1990s (see Stuart 1996). This put forward training as an agenda for unions to engage employers and (potential) members in interests of mutual concern around skills (see Stuart, 1996). Yet, the agenda proved a difficult cause for unions to advance. Case study research found wide ranging benefits where training was the focus of collective bargaining (Winterton & Winterton 1994), but this took place in relatively few workplaces (Claydon & Green 1994), often with a degree of employer antagonism and no support from government. Critics suggested that, despite the rhetoric of mutual gains, conflicts and differences of interest (such as what training and for whom?) hampered the development of union engagement in this agenda (Stuart, 1996; Winterton and Winterton, 1994). It was also the case that trade unions lacked sufficient capacity to push an agenda forward around training and skills. Yet, in the absence of state and statutory support, it was down to unions themselves to develop activity at the local, sectoral and national level, to build capacity and enhance legitimacy in the skills field.

This was progressed by a variety of, often quite small-scale, demonstration projects, during the mid/ late 1990s. This included a series of projects run by regional TUC offices with local Training and Enterprise Councils (subsequently Learning and Skills Councils) and individual unions running their own initiatives. UNISON, for example, had sought to create a 'learning advocate' for workplace enthusiasts that had benefited from their longer-standing workforce development programme, Return to Learn (Munro & Rainbird 2000; Munro & Rainbird 2004). These approaches informed the design of wider developments around the new union learning representative role. In practical terms, three key developments stand out. Firstly, the Union Learning Fund was established in 1998. Secondly, statutory rights were granted to trade Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), which came into effect in 2003 granting rights to reasonable paid time off (i.e. it is covered by employers) to train as a ULR and to undertake ULR duties; employees also have a right to talk with their ULR. Thirdly, the TUC brought its learning activities, including the administration of the ULF and TUC education for workplace representatives, together in 2006 under the umbrella of unionlearn.

The position that unions find themselves in 2015 in relation to the learning agenda is thus very different to when unions first sought to raise awareness of training as a collective concern in the late 1980s. These developments pose a number of important questions about the implications for how union learning activity relates to the ways unions engage with their employees (members and non-members), with employers and with government.

Over the last 15 years or so an academic research agenda has emerged on union-led learning, often with different perspectives taken on the perceived benefits of this agenda. Some assert that learning represents essentially a 'displacement' activity, which detracts, and possibly even undermines, the core agenda of unions, which should focus on issues of pay and collective bargaining and organising activity to build representative strength (McIlroy 2008). Other research, typically based on more empirical grounded investigations, suggest that members themselves are enthusiastic about learning, with a large unmet demand for learning that unions can mobilise around and link to core union activities (Findlay et al. 2007; Moore & Ross 2008).

Studies have also explored if and how union learning influences employer practice on workplace learning and staff development and how employers see the value in engagement with unions on this theme. The limited evidence on employer involvement has been mixed. Hoque and Bacon's (2008) analysis of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS), for example, concluded that unions were unable to raise levels of employer investment in training. In contrast, other analysis has suggested that unions can influence employer policy and learning outcomes for the better (Heyes & Stuart 1998; Stuart & Robinson 2007; Stuart et al. 2013). A recent analysis by Stuart et al (2015) of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) found considerable 'union mark-up' on the extent to which employees receive

training and that this effect has increased since the 2008 crisis. Furthermore, employees that had received training within unionised contexts were less adversely affected by the recession and were more likely to receive pay rises as result of their training.

Despite this body of research, large-scale analyses of learners' and employers' experiences of union-led learning are rather rare. Where researchers have explored the union role it is typically via nationally representative data-sets that do not have union learning as their central focus, such as the LFS and WERS. Few bespoke surveys designed specifically to evaluate the impact of union learning on learners and employers have been conducted, and those that have often suffer from rather low sample sizes. No study to-date has been able to link learner and employer data. This study attempts to fill this empirical gap.

Against this backdrop, the aims of the report are evaluative. The report aims to identify and evaluate the key outputs and outcomes that union learning delivered during ULF Rounds 15 and Round 16, which commenced in 2012 and completed in 2016. Round 15 ran for three years between 2012/13 to 2014/15 and Round 16 ran for one year, ending in March 2016.

1.3 The Union Learning Fund and unionlearn

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was introduced in 1998 under the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and unions have been invited to apply for funding to support learning projects on an annual (with some recent exceptions) basis since then. The primary objective of the ULF is to develop the capacity of trade unions and Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to work with employers, employees and learning providers to encourage greater take-up of learning in the workplace. Unionlearn is the learning section of the TUC and covers vocational training, adult learning and education for trade union representatives and regional officers and strategic support for national officers. Its main aims are to: help unions to become learning organisations; broker learning opportunities for their members; identify and share good practice; promote learning agreements; research union learning and skills needs; and support union members on learning and skills bodies and help shape sector skills agreements. Since 2007 unionlearn has administered the ULF via funding support from DfES (latterly BIS and now DfE)⁶. The policy focus of union learning is that it contributes to Government investment in skills. In return for receipt of the ULF grant unions are required to focus activity on priority areas within government skills policy. Therefore in recent years unions have initiated projects aimed at encouraging the take-up of apprenticeships, raising functional (English and Maths) skills, working with employers to improve productivity, trialling work on approaches to skills utilisation with a number of employers and reaching out to non-unionised workplaces.

⁶ See for example the funding statement set out in https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278529/bis-14-p172a-skills-funding-statement-2013-2016.pdf

In recent years there has been increasing governmental interest in assessing the economic and social impact of skills escalation and the role of unionlearn and the ULF in supporting such developments. Combined with the broader climate of austerity, cuts to public funding and the requirement for greater accountability concerning the use of public funds, this has resulted in changes to the level of funding the ULF and unionlearn has received, to the way individual projects are performance monitored and to the processes for awarding grants to unions.

1.4 Unionlearn and the ULF funding settlement

There have been significant changes to the structure and funding of unionlearn in the period under investigation for this study. The total number of staff employed by unionlearn has declined from around 160 in 2012 to just 22 in 2016, which has included the loss of regional unionlearn teams and national union development workers. Such a reduction in resources has clearly impacted on the level of support that unionlearn can provide to unions for the learning agenda. Specifically, the level of direct ‘hands on’ support for ULF projects has reduced dramatically. At the same time, the performance monitoring function has remained constant in terms of the number of staff employed, and the degree of monitoring has increased in frequency, rigour and detail.

Table 1.1: Distribution of ULF grant funding Rounds 15 and 16							
ULF Year	Financial Year	Total grant received from BIS (A+B)	(A) BIS Funding for unionlearn	% of total funding		(B) ULF Grants to Unions	% of total funding
R15 Y1	2012/13	20,210,000	7,198,000	36%		13,012,000*	64%
R15 Y2	2013/14	18,900,000	5,786,000	31%		13,114,000*	69%
R15 Y3	2014/15	15,360,000	3,153,000	21%		12,207,000*	79%
R16	2015/16	14,000,000	2,837,000	20%		11,163,000	80%

Source: unionlearn ULF Team. *These are the amounts granted to unions, not the total amount spent as quoted in further tables for Round 15. Since Round 15, further action has been taken to address underspend

These changes to the structure of unionlearn are illustrated in Table 1.1 above with regard to the distribution of funds between the ‘management fee’ taken by unionlearn and grants to unions. The overall BIS grant decreased from £20.2 million to £14 million per annum over the course of four years. However, in response, unionlearn substantially cut back the size of its own operation in order to sustain a similar level of grant funding for unions. In the first year of R15 (2012/13), 64 per cent of the BIS grant was distributed by unionlearn to unions for learning projects, while in 2015/16, 80 per cent was granted to unions. This represents a fall of just under £2 million in funding for learning projects in a practical sense, while the management fee taken by unionlearn has more than halved, falling by over £4 million.

1.5 ULF bid assessment and project monitoring processes

Significant changes to the process for awarding funding were implemented during the four-year period of this evaluation. For the last three years, grant awards to unions have been subject to stricter and more rigorous procedures⁷. Prior to Round 16 grants were awarded by a ULF panel that included the ULF manager, unionlearn director, BIS officials and four union officials, but, following a tendering process there was no systematic scoring. The assessment panel now has an independent chair and the assessment process entails a much more rigorous system of scoring. The four union officials and BIS make decisions on grant awards, while there is no decision-making power from unionlearn on the panel. Each bid is assessed and scored on criteria that were mutually agreed between BIS and unionlearn. These criteria were: 1 – strategic fit; 2 – sustainability and value for money; and, 3 – equality and diversity.

Strategic fit is scored out of 60, in 2 parts: fit with priorities (40) and evidence of impact and added value (20). Fit with priorities requires evidence that shows a need for the bid exists and a description of how the approach proposed might be successful. Evidence of impact and added value draws on the union's record of success and potential to deliver improved or innovative outcomes. Sustainability and Value for Money is scored out of 25, and assesses the value per learner and potential to lever in additional funds, either in cash or in-kind from employers or the union itself. Equality and Diversity is scored out of 15, measuring the extent to which a project shows it can engage with a diverse base of learners, either within or external to the union.

Thirty-three projects were approved under Round 16 for grant funding, while nine were rejected. Of those applications approved, there was a wide variance between the highest scoring (81) and the lowest scoring (41) applications. The mean score of approved projects was 60.5. Scores for the nine applications that were rejected ranged from 31 to 40, with a mean of 36.7, excluding three to which no score was assigned. From the scoring data it appears that the quantitative threshold for funding was 41. The reasons for low scores and rejected applications included poorly written bids, poor value for money and insufficient proposals to lever-in further funding, the likely potential to substitute for employer training and poorly defined outcomes.

The performance monitoring of projects has also increased in rigour. The unionlearn central database (UCD) was developed with increased performance monitoring of projects in mind, though little has changed in terms of functional utilisation between the UCD and the previous ULF database. The main change was a move from quarterly reporting to monthly reporting of expenditure and project outcomes, enabled by the UCD. This has reportedly improved the reliability and clarity of reporting, with financial expenditure now accountable to within 1 per

⁷ Details are in the Bidding Guidance Document available at <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/ulf-resources>

cent of the overall budget. More detail on the reporting of outcomes follows in the management information analysis section. Changes to the unionlearn prospectus have not been so significant, apart from the move to monthly reporting for projects, although in recent years the prospectus has more closely reflected government skills policy, resulting in a continued focus on functional skills, a strengthened focus on apprenticeships and addressing workplace productivity.

1.6 Previous evaluations of the ULF

Numerous previous evaluations of the ULF have been conducted. York Consulting Limited (YCL) conducted evaluations each year from 1998-2006, covering the first seven rounds of the ULF (Shaw 1999; Cutter et al. 2000; Antill et al. 2001; Shaw et al. 2002; Shaw et al. 2006). Similar evaluations were conducted of the Scottish ULF (Shaw et al. 2002; Armistead & Shaw 2003; Findlay et al. 2005). The Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at the University of Leeds undertook an evaluation of the ULF Rounds 8-11 that reported in 2010 (Stuart et al. 2010), while an evaluation of Rounds 11-14 was conducted by Miller et al (2012). The previous evaluations all detailed the key outputs of the ULF, drawing from available management information and explored the wide ranging impacts of the ULF. Early evaluations focused attention on the way in which project funds were managed and made valuable conclusions about how outputs were recorded and the evolving nature of capacity building and sustainability.

The findings of the evaluation of Rounds 4-7, detailed significant achievements in terms of learning outputs and also noted positively the degree of capacity building and embedding or learning within union structures and a degree of employer support for union learning (Shaw et al, 2006). In terms of sustainability, it was claimed that some 580 learning centres had been established. However, the evaluation noted serious difficulties in terms of data collection and expressed caution in terms of the validity and reliability of the findings. It was noted that, 'the constraints of the sample mean that there are limitations concerning the validity and reliability of the resulting data' (Shaw, 2006: 112). This was most notable in terms of the evaluation's survey of employers, but the surveys of unions and learners also suffered from low response rates. Not surprisingly, while the overall conclusions of the evaluation were positive in terms of the impact of the ULF on the development of the lifelong learning agenda, its recommendations came down heavily on the need for more accurate information and data collection, monitoring and recording. Similar comments were made in the evaluation undertaken in 2010, noting that wider generalisability of some the data needed to be treated with caution. Although, to some extent the rigorous triangulation of the analysis compensated for some of these short-comings, the report noted:

"Samples sizes and responses rates were larger than for previous evaluations. However, the evaluation did face difficulties in identifying with precision the population parameters for some of the data sources, notably the learner survey, the employer survey and the content analysis of learning agreements." (Stuart et al 2010, p ix).

The evaluation of Rounds 11-14 by Miller et al (2012) while commissioned by BIS was not formally published, although the report is available online via the unionlearn website. While its main aim was to provide qualitative insights into how union learning could contribute to the take-up of apprenticeships and the engagement on non-union employers, it also included an analysis of MI data and of learner data collected through the Unet and European Social Fund reporting provisions. This evaluation was also accompanied by a series of protocols for future evaluation, including questionnaire templates for learning and employer surveys, although these were never operationalised.

In addition to the more formal large-scale evaluations, other supplementary research has been commissioned by unionlearn to generate insights on under-explored issues, notably, a survey of union learners exploring economic impact (Neild and Stevens, 2015) and a survey of employers and review of learner data reporting the impact of union learning (Stuart et al 2013). Where comparable data are available from these previous studies this is presented in this report to provide a context or benchmark data with which to assess the outcomes reported in the current study on Rounds 15 and 16 of the ULF.

1.7 Evaluation aims and objectives

In 2015, following a formal competitive tendering process, unionlearn commissioned the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at University of Leeds and the Marchmont Observatory at the University of Exeter to conduct an evaluation of Rounds 15 and 16. As part of the governance of the evaluation, the research team reported periodically to a Steering Group that included representatives from unionlearn, BIS (now DfE) and individual unions.

The invitation to tender specified the criteria for the evaluation. In overarching terms, the objectives of the evaluation were two-fold:

- To evaluate the extent to which ULF projects funded under Rounds 15 and 16 have met their stated objectives;
- To assess the extent to which unionlearn has met its objectives in specifically supporting the delivery against objectives of ULF Rounds 15 and 16 and its supporting role more generally.

Against these broad objectives the evaluation aims are as follows:

- To evaluate overall impact, quantified where possible, via the capture and analysis of appropriate and varied data sources. This includes analysis of individual learners that have engaged in union learning and the perceptions of employers;
- To identify the key challenges and barriers ULF projects and unionlearn face when trying to achieve objectives;

- To analyse best practice across the ULF and to extrapolate lessons learnt that may inform key recommendations that may assist ULF and unionlearn in the future;
- To develop practical measures to facilitate the analysis of cohorts of union learners and employers over time to provide robust longitudinal analysis in the future.
- To engage in a formative manner with unionlearn and other key stakeholders and to disseminate the evaluation in an appropriate form.

The two ULF Rounds (15 and 16) under investigation had different objectives, as detailed in the respective ULF Prospectus for each round:

- The objectives of ULF Round 15: engaging disadvantaged learners; tackling skills gaps through apprenticeships and sectoral strategies; developing high performance workplaces; reaching out to non-unionised workplaces; equality and diversity for all.
- The objectives of ULF Round 16: engaging disadvantaged learners and workers with few/no qualifications; equality and diversity; young people and progression; stronger learning infrastructure, workforce development; sustainability, value for money and mainstreaming of union learning activity.

In looking to support the delivery of the ULF, unionlearn has a stated set of objectives, which can be summarised as:

- Building union capacity so that learning becomes a core union activity.
- Developing the role of ULRs in raising demand for learning.
- Maximising the union contribution to government skills strategy.
- Helping unions and ULRs with an IAG framework.
- Assisting with developing union learning centres.
- Helping unions to develop partnerships and agreements with employers.
- Helping to support partnerships with learning providers to ensure effective delivery for union learners.
- Helping unions with the development of, and engagement in, meso- and macro-level partnerships.

The success criteria of unionlearn include: scale, nature and effectiveness of activities and outcome; accessibility; inclusion; employability; progression; capacity building; employer engagement; mainstreaming; productivity, organisational performance and skills utilisation; impact on union membership and effectiveness of union presence and sustainability of union learning. Further detail of the indicators used to explore these themes is shown in the appendix.

1.8 Approach

Previous evaluations of the ULF and unionlearn identified the limited scope for a counter-factual evaluative approach. This is because the basis for such an approach was not scripted into the conduct of ULF projects. Research in the area is also complicated by the fact that data on the overall population of learners and workplaces in which ULF funded activity operates is weak. This limits the scope for measuring a baseline against which measures can be subsequently evaluated and from which a representative sample of participants for survey purposes or a 'control' or 'matched' groups could be drawn for more experimental research design (see supplementary appendix for further discussion of evaluation approaches).

The main approach taken to date has been that of *retrospective evaluation* – i.e. evaluating what happened after the fact. Such an approach largely informs this evaluation. We can ensure the evaluation is methodologically robust in three ways. First, follow the principles of *realist evaluation*, whereby protocols and analysis are carefully undertaken on the basis of what we know (i.e. prior theory and knowledge) and situated within the wider context of the ULF. Second, we draw from multiple data sources to ensure that single-respondent bias is addressed and triangulation ensured. Third, we draw on extant data sources and appropriate benchmarks with which to develop the analysis.

A challenge for the quantitative study relates to the identification of populations and derived samples. There is still no central repository by which all learners supported during a round of the ULF can be identified. A similar problem arises in terms of employers engaged during specific rounds of the ULF. The ULF database does provide space for employer contacts to be added, but projects tend to complete this with different levels of precision. Learner contact details are held by single unions or are dispersed across provider networks and confidentiality issues affect accessing.

The plan of work is designed to address these design issues and develop an approach that can best derive data to meet the evaluation objectives. Further, the report includes a proposed approach to developing an evaluation framework that can help enable the tracking and reporting of data in a more systematic way to aid future assessments and development of the ULF.

Empirically, the report draws from five different sources of data. First, we review the management information that is collected and reported as part of the ULF monitoring process. Second, we draw on a unique survey of more than 2, 000 union learners. Third, we draw on a unique survey of 385 employers. Fourth, we present data from 22 project managers that participated in a series of action learning sets. Fifth, and finally, we present findings from 12 interviews with key stakeholders. Table 1.2 illustrates how the key elements of the evaluation and the sources of evidence generated map to each of the evaluation objectives.

Table 1.2 Evaluation objectives and sources of evidence

Evidence Objectives	ULF activity MI & benchmarks	Union Action Learning Sets	Employer survey and interviews	Individual experiences	UK skills stakeholders
Scale & type of activities and outcomes	*			*	* benchmarks
Accessibility	*			*	*
Inclusion	*		*	*	
Employability			*	*	
Progression			*	*	
Capacity building	*	*			
Employer engagement	*		*		
Mainstreaming		*	*		*
Productivity, org' performance			*	*	
Impact on unions		*			
Sustainability		*	*		*

By drawing data from multiple sources we are able to present a more robust and fully-rounded evaluation of the efficacy and impact of the ULF. Multiple sources of data allow us to corroborate the findings from any single source that help to overcome the limitations of any single data source. Detailed methods of data collection are presented in each section.

1.9 The plan of work

The evaluation work-plan for the study included the following key stages: inception and engagement; design of evaluation framework and protocols; mapping ULF outputs and MI benchmarking; Action Learning Set groups with union officers leading ULF projects; employers' survey on engagement, perceptions and outcomes from union learning; learner survey of individual learner experiences and impact of union learning; impact assessment; reporting and future evaluation strategy and dissemination of findings.

1.10 Structure of the report

The findings from the evaluation are set out in the following sections:

- Section 2: ULF funding profile and performance – Rounds 15 and 16.
- Section 3: Learner Survey findings.
- Section 4: Employer Survey findings.
- Section 5: Multivariate Analysis of learners and employers.
- Section 6: Union Project Officers Action Learning Set findings.
- Section 7: Stakeholder interview findings.
- Section 8: Economic and Fiscal impact assessment.
- Section 9: Thematic Review and Conclusions.

Detailed tables referred to in the Appendix are in a separate volume which contains the following:

- Appendix 1 Evaluation overview;
- Appendix 2 ULF MI Analysis;
- Appendix 3 Learner Survey data;
- Appendix 4 Stakeholder Interviews;
- Appendix 5 Impact Estimate Methodology;
- Appendix 6 Developing an Evaluation Framework for the ULF;
- Appendix 7 Learner Survey Questionnaire;
- Appendix 8 Employer Survey Questionnaire;
- Appendix 9 Action Learning Set protocol; and
- Appendix 10 Stakeholder Interviews discussion Guide.

2 Analysis of ULF management information Rounds 15 & 16

2.1 Overview

This section reports key output data from ULF Rounds 15 and 16. Data are taken from the management information system developed by TUC/unionlearn and reported by individual projects as part of the administration of ULF funding. The section reviews the sources of data used, provides an overview of ULF funding since 1998 and data on the overall learning outputs delivered across all funding rounds, in order to give an illustration of how value for money has changed over time. The section then reviews the funding for Rounds 15 and 16 in more detail, followed by data on outputs achieved and performance against profiled targets.

2.2 Sources of data and reporting

The data were derived predominantly from the unionlearn central database (UCD), which has been in operation since 2012 (the start of ULF Round 15, and represents an upgrade to previous versions of the UCD). Where relevant, data are presented from previous rounds, drawn from previous versions of the official ULF database. The current UCD provides outcome data, by project, on demographics of union learning representatives, forms of learning undertaken and support structures created such as learning centres and learning agreements. The UCD differs from the previous protocols in that it has an area to upload contacts of employers and details of signed learning agreements. However, these functions have been very under-utilised. In total, only eight learning agreements were uploaded on to this are of the site as of March 2016, while details of only 20 employers were recorded using this function⁸. More records of learners were evident on the database (2,307), but this is a small fraction of the number of learning episodes recorded in the output statistics (53,105) for Rounds 15 and 16.

In addition to the UCD, data on reported outcomes were also derived in a similar format from the unionlearn project monitoring function. These data are considered, by unionlearn, to be more accurate than that supplied via the UCD, because it allowed unionlearn's previously employed management information officer to correct faults generated by the UCD reporting system. It was these data produced by unionlearn's management information function that was reportedly used to inform the quarterly and annual reports for BIS. This potentially more accurate data was only available by project to the evaluation team for the final year of Round 15 (2014-15) and for the first ten months of Round 16, though unionlearn's aggregate totals for Round 16 were also available. For this reason, we were not able to evaluate the overall outcomes for Rounds 15 and 16 using these alternative data. The only full and complete dataset we had access to was the UCD. Thus, the total outcome measures we identify may differ slightly to those reported elsewhere, which may draw on different reporting systems. Where possible we have shown both data sources (and this is indicated in the relevant tables). Despite some inconsistencies, all forms of data we had access to were of value for the evaluation.

⁸ Some unions did continue to upload learning agreements into others areas of the database, such as a generic 'files' section.

Where appropriate we also drew from data generated by previous evaluations conducted by the research team. Additional data for this evaluation was also derived from various sources within unionlearn, including financial data on levered-in support, although these data are not complete. Further evidence was supplied by the ULF coordinator, including information on the bidding and grant award process, as well as data on changes to unionlearn's share of funding for management fees and distribution of funds to ULF projects.

2.3 ULF funding 1998-2016

Table 2.1 shows ULF funding for all projects for all rounds to date. The ULF distributed £179 million between 1998 and 2015, with the largest award (£37.84 million) distributed to Round 15 (a three year programme running from 2012 to 2015), and the smallest (£0.79 million) for Round 14, (a one year programme which started in 2011). Over the period 1998 to 2016, the ULF supported the delivery of the following outputs: 1,447,750 learning episodes, 31,310 ULRs trained, 1,432 new learning centres and partner relationships developed with employers via the signature of 2,304 learning agreements.

Table 2.1: Funding and outcomes for all ULF funded rounds

	ULF Funding (£ Million)	Levered in Funding (£ Million)	Total Funding (£ Million)	No of learning episodes	New Learning Centres Opened	ULRs trained	Learning Agreements Signed
Round 1 (1998-01)	1.02	0.45	1.47	2,172	11	734	
Round 2 (1999-02)	2.78	0.56	3.34	4,460	15	882	
Round 3 (2000-3)	4.73	1.64	6.37	7,322	40	1640	
Round 4 (2001-4)	6.49	3.23	9.72	14,330	66	1540	
Round 5 (2002-5)	9.16	0.29	9.45	8,800	62	2724	204
Round 6 (2003-6)	10.34	6.98	17.32	62,087	49	2383	134
Round 7 (2004-7)	13.86	9.86	23.72	67,657	229	3799	500
Round 8 (2005-8)	7.69	4.61	12.30	107,219	104	2169	196
Round 9 (2006-9)	19.39	10.37	29.76	99,854	118	3102	245
Round 10 (2007-10)	5.39	1.75	7.14	116,782	8	865	73
Round 11 (2008-11)	21.05	11.37	32.42	113,092	166	3222	255
Round 12 (2009-11)	2.19	No data	2.19	11,094	3	281	18
Round 13 (2010-13)	25.13	No data	25.13	289,936	129	3485	159
Round 14 (2011-12)	0.79	No data	0.79	9,802	0	60	11
Round 15 (2012-15)	37.84	4.79**	42.63	395,508	256	3617	356
Round 16 (2015-16)	11.16	37.83	49.46	180,194*	176	807	153
Total Rounds 1-16	£179.01	£93.73**	£272.74**	1,447,750	1,432	31,310	2,304

Source: Round 1-11 figures are taken from Stuart et al (2010).

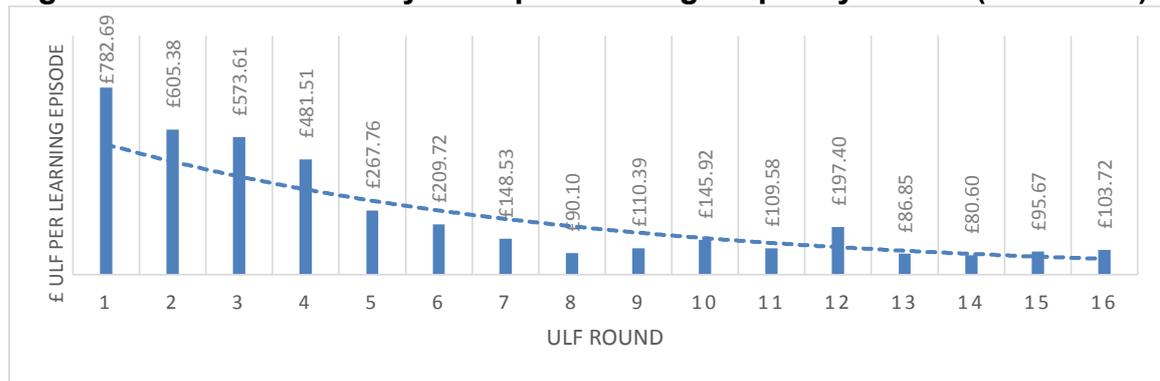
Figures reflect year the contract started and could be spread over three years.

* Multiple data sources exist for the number of learners for Round 16. The figure include data from UCD plus 41,841 informal adult community learning (IACL) learning episodes not included in UCD records.

** Data on levered-in funding is incomplete and for R15 is derived from selected projects only and represents an underestimate of the total.

Figure 2.1 shows the average cost of learning outputs across all years of funding. This is a simple measure of all outputs divided by the total ULF budget. The interpretation of this data requires caution as the measure of learning outputs changed in 2010 (Round 13) from all learning episodes, to all learners engaged. However, the general trend across the two periods (Rounds 1-12 and Rounds 13-16) is of a fall in cost per output, to a level of circa £80-100 per learner.

Figure 2.1 Value for money: cost per learning output by Round (1998-2016)



2.4 ULF funding for evaluation rounds 15 and 16

While the above data shows outcome and funding figures for all ULF rounds, the following analysis details outcome data by Rounds 15 and 16, which are the specific focus of this evaluation. Round 15 was funded to a total award of £37.84 million over the three years for which most of the 44 projects ran. Table 2.2 shows all Round 15 projects by union and the amounts of funding each received. The largest award was to Unite’s for the project, ‘A National Strategy for Lifelong Learning’, which received an award of a little under £5.5 million. Twelve projects across ten unions received awards of between one and three million pounds: BFAWU, CWU, FBU, GMB, PCS, POA, RMT, TSSA, UNISON and USDAW. All other projects received funding of less than £1 million.

Data on levered-in funding for Round 15 were not available or quantified on any of the MI documents to which access was granted. Nevertheless some indications or estimates of potential levered in funding were available in section 6.1 of the bid application forms on the UCD. This section asks applicants to detail levered-in funding. In some cases this is clearly specified, with quantitative data that can be easily summed. In other cases, there is more of a narrative with no quantification. We have therefore just compiled data where it was available, to provide some indicative, although conservative, figures. Since the third and final year of Round 15 projects was a continuation year, it proved impossible to estimate levered-in funding for this period and so our totals for Round 15 are based on years one and two only. Overall, there were 18 projects where leverage was quantified. The ULF funding was for £16,115,965 while, conservatively, the leverage was £4,778,762.

Table 2.3 shows similar data for Round 16. These 33 projects were funded for just one year, and either directly or indirectly continued work from previous projects. Given the one year duration of this round’s projects funding awards were lower than for Round 15, although on a year-by-year comparison the amounts were similar. Again, the largest award was given to Unite, for £1.9 million, while the lowest award was for £54,470 to the National Association of Stable Staff.

Table 2.2: Round 15 ULF and levered in funding by project, union and year

	R15 Year 1	R15 Year 2	Levered in funds: Y1&2	R15 Year 3	Total Round 15
	2012/13	2013/14		2014/15	
Union	£	£	£	£	£
Aegis	96,255	107,232	NQ*	231,247	434,734
ASLEF	279,437	279,264	644,865	298,786	857,487
ATL	51,654	42,745	638,286	166,267	260,666
BECTU	138,478	136,954	191,174	120,914	396,346
BFAWU	336,319	341,590	48,000	397,701	1,075,610
BSU	91,685	102,546	602,285	150,182	344,413
Castleford LC	225,826	189,159	NQ	212,548	627,533
Community	238,246	233,204	NQ	235,074	706,524
CSP	206,785	220,417	NQ	N/A	427,203
CTU LC		127,533	7,430	N/A	127,533
CWU	368,313	357,715	NQ	380,624	1,106,652
EQUITY FEU	121,621	119,876	NQ	119,481	360,978
FBU	513,981	511,763	NQ	542,727	1,568,470
FDA	233,431	218,192	735,577	N/A	451,623
GMB (south)	570,673	580,059	12,000	633,496	1,784,228
GMB (Y&D)	408,150	425,409	NQ	442,086	1,275,644
GMB (NW)	241,741	244,231	80,875	300,811	786,784
GMB (National)	18,093	169,680	NQ	N/A	187,773
Merseylearn	195,611	160,316	2,500	165,445	521,372
MIP	72,203	86,847	171,404	N/A	159,049
NAPO	148,573	122,607	NQ	N/A	271,180
NASS	26,869	45,770	NQ	70,098	142,736
NASUWT	8,018	50,468	NQ	N/A	58,486
NUM	89,112	88,420	NQ	N/A	177,532
NUT	27,420	264,948	NQ	N/A	292,368
PCS	1,206,602	870,807	237,847	907,482	2,984,891
PFA	295,806	236,681	34,000	233,689	766,176
POA	718,539	675,573	NQ	677,595	2,071,707
PROSPECT	214,174	237,173	NQ	N/A	451,347
RCM	200,040	198,664	NQ	218,026	616,730
RCN	158,869	135,990	249,347	180,581	475,440
RMT	460,859	493,913	NQ	487,658	1,442,430
SCP	292,978	251,876	NQ	243,951	788,805
TSSA	469,890	413,505	270,315	295,932	1,179,327
UCATT	192,347	169,104	163,383	244,443	605,894
UCU	79,335	71,083	NQ	75,760	226,178
UFS	119,081	121,741	NQ	133,553	374,375
UNISON North	404,685	402,211	319,034	421,902	1,228,798
UNISON National	728,666	630,470	NQ	670,426	2,029,562
Unite	1,698,952	1,828,945	NQ	1,947,124	5,475,021
Unity	43,550	47,950	NQ	48,923	140,424
URTU		164,242	NQ	163,780	328,022
USDAW	660,836	713,617	370,440	735,875	2,110,328
West Bromwich Staff Union	26,280	60,879	NQ	58,443	145,601
Totals:	12,679,986	12,951,368	4,778,762	12,212,630	37,843,983

Source: unionlearn for ULF funding; Levered in funding data was compiled from project applications on the UCD and cannot be verified * NQ = Not Quantified

Table 2.3: Round 16 ULF and levered in funding by project and union					
Union	Bid Funding Grant (£)	Leverage from Employer	Leverage from Union	Total Leverage*	Project value per BIS pound
AEGIS	250,000	201,792	55,000	256,792	2.03
ASLEF	300,000	370,392	120,182	490,574	2.64
ATL	160,000			97,499	1.61
BECTU	133,773	51,200	127,184	178,384	2.33
BFAWU	350,000			32,070	1.09
BSU	195,065	1,789,260	1,463,342	3,252,602	17.67
Community	188,469	605,250	80,595	685,845	4.64
CWU	362,744			2,654,061	8.32
EQUITY	121,850			43,300	1.36
FBU	501,826			437,000	1.87
GMB Mids	300,000			118,730	1.40
GMB NW	200,000	19,000	25,500	44,500	1.22
GMB South	400,000	126,245	36,681	162,926	1.41
GMB Y&D	300,000		148,903	148,903	1.50
NASS	54,470			20,288	1.37
NUJ	60,000			103,560	2.73
PCS	800,000			399,478	1.50
PFA	243,888			34,500	1.14
POA	700,000	295,962	198,062	494,024	1.71
RCM	200,884			163,097	1.81
RCN	175,000			191,814	2.10
RMT	400,000			156,500	1.39
SCP	179,355	123,073	112,850	235,923	2.32
UCATT 522	240,000			336,174	2.40
UCATT 521	161,778			32,330	1.20
UCATT 527	350,000			131,767	1.38
UNISON National	542,266	700,000	1,253,598	1,953,598	4.60
UNISON Northern	372,176	694,116	85,200	779,316	3.09
Unite	1,900,000			23,539,300	13.39
Unity	53,683			19,485	1.36
URTU	161,000			376,440	3.34
USDAW	730,000			464,470	1.64
West Bromwich	74,838	36,714	11,780	48,494	1.65
Totals	11,163,065	4,811,212	3,663,877	37,826,952	3.00 (mean)

Source: unionlearn. Levered in funding amounts cannot be verified

For Round 16, more detailed data was available on the leverage of additional funding by project, as also shown in Table 2.3. This data is self-reported by unions and is not verified, therefore, there is no way to verify the accuracy of these estimates. For some projects levered funds were broken down by source, either from the union or from employers. Where this has been shown, for 13 of the projects, over £4.8 million is reported to come from employers, while unions gave over £3.6 million. Employers reportedly contribute slightly more than unions, and total leverage is nearly £38 million. Comparing this to the ULF grant of £11.1 million, this represents an average £3 of value for every £1 of public money. Two outliers levered in significantly more than others with £13.39 per £1 and £17.76 per £1 reported. The lowest reported level of leverage was £1.09 per £1, yet this still suggests that the value of levered in contribution was greater than the public funding awarded.

2.5 ULF outcome data and analysis

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 detail outcomes from Round 15 and Round 16 projects respectively showing the numbers of learning activities undertaken for selected types of learning, qualifications achieved and support structures to institutionalise learning. The headline figure of the total number of learning episodes accessed through the union route (highlighted in grey) relates to all types of union learning activity. The full list of learning outcomes are shown in Appendix 2.2 and 2.3. The figures presented are the actual reported outcomes, followed by the 'profile', or target, specified in application bids for funding. The 'actual' figure is that reported at the end of the project and, for Round 15 is the sum of the learning outputs over the three years. The final column shows the difference between targets and reported achievements over the duration of the project. Where actual outcomes are greater than those profiled they are shown in bold. Where the final column is left blank, this indicates areas of learning activity that took place but did not have a target or 'profile', and therefore outcome as a percentage of target cannot be shown.

In total, across Round 15, 395,508 learning episodes were accessed through the union route, 150% over target. The number of functional skills (maths and English) learners was strongly above target by almost eight thousand at 22,995, with just under five thousand achieving qualifications as a result. The number of GCSE learners was also way above target at 6,439, while the number of ICT learners also exceeded the target by around 50 per cent. The trend continued with the number of learners on FE programmes almost doubling intended enrolments, and while no ESOL learners were predicted, just over a thousand undertook this form of learning. The round provided 120,578 CPD episodes, which was 50,315 over target. The exception was the number of learners on HE programmes, which was 51 per cent below target. Against a backdrop of increasing policy focus on apprenticeships, a target for ULF Round 15 was set of 15,288 new apprenticeship enrolments. This was exceeded in practice, with 17,501 apprentices recruited. Round 15 also delivered 417,031 learner support referrals to provide information, advice or guidance, nearly double the target set.

While the delivery of learning outcomes was high and most targets were exceeded, Table 2.4 shows that this was not the case for the development of learning support structures. The number of new learning centres opened (256), and those significantly enhanced (250) both fell just below target. The number of partnership agreements signed with learning providers was below target at 341, while 356 learning agreements were signed with employers. All of these measures were below target.

Targets relating to ULR recruitment and training at both the initial and follow-on level were also missed by a substantial margin, which was the result of almost all unions falling short on these performance indicators. In Round 15 ULF projects trained 3,617 new ULRs and put 2,106 existing ULRs through enhanced follow-on stage two training, both of which were significantly below target. In the final year of Round 15, no union met or exceeded their profile on both levels of ULR training, although ASLEF and the FBU hit the target for new ULRs, while the RCN exceeded targets for ULR follow-on training.

Table 2.4: Selected outcomes for Round 15							
Outcome Indicator	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Profile Total	Actual Total	Difference	% Achieved
				R15	R15	R15	R15
Number of new ULRs completing Stage 1 initial training	1416	1343	858	6058	3617	-2441	60%
Number of ULRs completing Stage 2	779	728	599	5887	2106	-3781	36%
Total number of Functional Skills learners	144	6394	16457	15084	22995	7911	152%
Total number of English Learners	0	320	8742	8947	9062	115	101%
Total number of English achievements	0	113	2380	0	2493	2493	
Total Number of Maths learners	0	144	7723	7487	7867	380	105%
Total number of Maths achievements	0	53	2191	0	2244	2244	
Total number of GCSE learners	0	131	6308	3959	6439	2480	163%
Total Number of learners on ICT courses	23195	40914	26925	61043	91034	29991	149%
Total number of ESOL Learners	293	401	345	0	1039	1039	
Number of learners on FE programmes	18740	21721	22182	33891	62643	28752	185%
Number of learners on HE programmes	1906	1376	795	8066	4077	-3989	51%
Number of Apprenticeships recruited	4836	6413	6252	15288	17501	2213	114%
Level 2	0	167	3633	0	3800	3800	
Level 3	0	11	1084	0	1095	1095	
CPD	38070	46228	35780	69763	120078	50315	172%
Total number of learning episodes via the union route	120746	155309	119453	262946	395508	132562	150%
Total number of learner support referrals	104434	220987	91610	215021	417031	202010	194%
Number of new learning centres opened	116	77	63	307	256	-51	83%
Number of existing learning centres significantly enhanced	78	96	76	264	250	-14	95%
Number of dissemination/networking events	3779	6767	4626	7441	15172	7731	204%
Number of signed partnership agreements with providers	104	116	121	486	341	-145	70%
Number of new learning agreements signed with employers	127	110	119	593	356	-237	60%
Number of workplaces covered by agreements	330	396	627	71	4923	4852	120%
Number of enhanced learning agreements signed with employers	19	24	21	384	64	-320	17%

Source: UCD

The majority of unions were responsible for this performance, although by the last extension year of round 15, a minority of projects were below profile. These were: GMB Reach Out, GMB Skills for Future, NASS, RCN, SCP, TSSA, and UNISON (national). PCS fell substantially below target, reaching only around 30 per cent of planned learners. With regards to learning opportunities accessed, the PCS, NASS and TSSA projects appeared to face particular problems in reaching learning targets during this reporting period. The number of functional skills learners exceeded the target by around 50 per cent, and there was significant variance here, with six union projects all doubling their profiled targets, while seven other projects achieved less than half their profiled outcomes for this performance indicator in the last year of Round 15. For apprenticeships recruited, the aggregated round over-performance was accounted for by the broad range of unions, with BECTU, GMB Reach Out, PCS, POA, RMT, UCATT, Unity and USDAW all significantly exceeding their targets. Unite was also a major contributor to the total of apprenticeships, although their target was only just achieved in the last reporting year of 2015.

Table 2.5 shows the same output measures for Round 16, and achievements in terms of learner outcomes and the development of workplace learning support structures. The number of English and Maths learners exceeded the target by just under 1,800, with just short of 4,000 gaining qualifications. The number of ICT learners vastly exceeded predictions, while learners enrolled on FE programmes more than doubled the profile target set. The drive to recruit apprentices continued in this round, although the target was just missed by circa 500 recruits. CPD continued as a profiled outcome, and was exceeded by just over ten per cent. The total number of learners and learner support referrals exceeded targets, and the total number of learning opportunities exceeded the target, at over 137,000. While almost all outcomes relating to structures to help formalise and deliver learning fell below target in Round 15, this round exceeded on both learning centre outcomes, with 176 new centres opened and 101 existing centres significantly enhanced.

The number of dissemination and networking events also exceeded target. While actual numbers relating to signed partnership agreements with providers, new or enhanced learning agreements were below target, the difference was not large. This could not be said for new ULRs trained, or existing ULRs conducting follow-on training, both of which were substantially below predictions.

The figures provided by unionlearn differ to those on the UCD, though these differences were, in most cases, very small. For example, 1,029 compared to 1,036 ULRs trained, or 7,193 compared to 7,292 apprenticeships recruited. The only substantial difference between the two sources was for the total number of learning episodes via the union route, which was 137,635 on the UCD compared to 180,194 from unionlearn. This is because the UCD figure does not include totals for Informal Adult and Community Learning (IACL). The figure for IACL, shown in Appendix 2.3, was for full outcomes for Round 16. This equated to 41,841, which, if added to the UCD figure for total learning episodes, was 179,476 and brings the difference between the two data sources in line with the very small differences found for other outcomes.

Table 2.5: Selected outcomes for Round 16

Outcome Indicator	Profile UCD	Actual UCD	Difference: UCD actual from UCD profile	Actual unionlearn	Difference: unionlearn actual from UCD profile	% Profile/ Actual
Number of new ULRs completing Stage 1 initial training	1577	1029	-548	1036	-541	65%
Number of ULRs completing Stage 2	1374	737	-637	942	-432	54%
Total number of Functional Skills learners	20694	22442	1748	23218	2524	108%
Total number of English Learners	11912	12305	393			103%
Total number of English achievements	0	1911	1911			
Total Number of Maths learners	9182	10225	1043			111%
Total number of Maths achievements	0	1776	1776			
Total number of GCSE learners	0	316	316			
Total Number of learners on ICT courses	23374	32008	8634	31937	8563	137%
Total number of ESOL Learners	0	625	625			
Number of learners on FE programmes	10858	22502	11644	22488	11630	207%
Number of learners on HE programmes	1286	1035	-251	1033	-253	80%
Number of Apprenticeships recruited	7724	7193	-531	7292	-432	93%
Level 2	0	4615	4615			
Level 3	0	1560	1560			
CPD	27030	30090	3060	30136	3106	111%
Total number of learning episodes via the union route	104341	137635	33294	180194	75853	132%
Total number of learner support referrals	78870	136544	57674			173%
Number of new learning centres opened	98	176	78	179	81	180%
Number of existing learning centres significantly enhanced	76	101	25			133%
Number of dissemination/networking events	3392	4370	978			129%
Number of signed partnership agreements with providers	193	161	-32			83%
Number of new learning agreements signed with employers	232	153	-79	155	-77	66%
Number of workplaces covered by agreements	0	813	813			
Number of enhanced learning agreements signed with employers	101	20	-81			20%

Source: UCD and unionlearn for actual reported to BIS

For Round 16, the shortfall in performance on both outcomes relating to ULR recruitment and training was generally shared across all unions and projects. Only the UNISON Bridges to Learning project managed to marginally exceed their profiles for both indicators.

As with the previous round, the total number of learning opportunities accessed was exceeded by some 30 per cent, although this success was shared by less unions. The GMB's Reach Out 5, NASS, NUJ, PCS, RCM, RCN, RMT, UCATT (Anfield), UNISON National and West Bromwich Building Society projects were all below target according to the most recent figures, while projects from the POA, UCATT (BSLWC), Unite and URTU vastly exceeded their profiles on this performance metric. The comparatively small gain over aggregated profile targets for functional skills learners was again delivered by a minority of unions. ATL, Community, GMB (LFW), PCS, POA, UCATT (Hinkley), Unite and URTU all surpassed the profiles significantly, while the UCATT national project did so by over 400 per cent. In contrast to Round 15, less apprentices were recruited than profiled. The majority of unions either underperformed with regard to apprentice recruitment, or did not list it as a target, and a relatively smaller number of projects contributed to the total apprenticeship outcomes for Round 16 than for other learning target areas. BECTU, GMB (South) UCATT (Anfield), and Unity all exceeded profiles on apprentice recruitment. Unite exceeded their target by over a thousand, USADW doubled their profile, while URTU reached over six times their profiled number.

2.6 Summary

This section has presented the output data for ULF Rounds 15 and 16. For evaluation purposes these data are useful. However, reporting such data is complicated by the fact that outcomes are reported via different routes and the figures often do not tally. In other words, unionlearn report data on outcomes to BIS that do not always tally with the data included on the UCD. As the UCD is the official reporting tool for the ULF, and often has the more complete set of data in historical terms, we have given priority to this data set. We have, however, wherever possible tried to find missing data and to verify all data reported. The UCD itself represents a value repository for data. However, its full functionality seems to be under-utilised.

The data reported show that, in the main, ULF projects represent value for money for the public purse and that as the cost of learning has declined value for money has increased. Judged against different reporting criteria, the success of Rounds 15 and 16 appear to be mixed. However, when evaluated against the key criteria of number of learners following different types of activity both rounds outperformed against target.

3 Learner survey

3.1 Overview

This section reports data from the survey of learners. It outlines the demographic profile of learners, and explores themes of inclusion and accessibility. The section then outlines the types of learning undertaken and qualifications achieved. Finally, this section explores the outcomes and impact of participating in union learning. The first part of the analysis explores data for all those responding to the 2016 survey and sets this in context by considering these findings in relation to a number of benchmarks. This includes analysis of a similar survey of union learners undertaken in 2015, data from the Labour Force Survey (December 2015) about the known profile of employees in workplaces where unions are present, data on learning undertaken via community provision and from the Census on the general population of adults in employment. The second part of the analysis undertakes statistical (multi-variate) analysis of those learners that took part in the two learner surveys (2015 and 2016).

3.2 Methodology

The learner survey repeated the methodological approach of the previous year but with a greater number of ULF projects and learners. All Round 16 ULF projects and Round 15 additions were invited to take part in the survey with each offered the option of cascading paper questionnaires, distributing a link to a web survey or deploying a combination of both methods. Twenty-six unions elected to take part in the survey with six either declining or not responding to the invitation. The two Round 16 unions that did not take part accounted for a very small share of the ULF Bid Funding Grant so participating projects were highly representative of the overall population of learners. The 2015 learner questionnaire was comprehensively overhauled reflecting the need for question formats that were amenable to multivariate analysis⁹ and to allow for new routes of enquiry. Almost 8,000 paper questionnaires were distributed to projects and a web link provided to an online survey using the survey software package, Snap. Responses were gathered over a period of three months to the end of January 2016.

As in the 2015 survey, unions distributed paper questionnaires and the email link using a variety of methods. While some were able to target their distribution efforts narrowly on known learners – either by utilising a specific database or enlisting the support of sub-national networks (e.g. Regional Learning Committee officers) or Union Learning Representatives – others distributed more broadly using generic member and training databases or publicising the survey in newsletters, on Facebook or tweets. The diversity in approaches renders the calculation of a response rate problematic, as we do not know precisely how many learners were invited to take part. However, follow-up with project managers suggests that around 20,000 members were potentially told about the survey although not all of these would have been learners and therefore part of the target population. Around 2,550 responses were generated through these means, resulting in a crude

⁹ Multivariate analysis refers to statistical processes that simultaneously analyse multiple independent variables (predictor variables) with multiple dependent variables (outcome variables).

response rate of around 13 per cent. While it is not possible to allocate all responses to a union – not all respondents answered questions about their previous and current union membership – it is clear that USDAW (388), UNISON (348), PCS (339) and Unite (308) generated substantially more responses than the other unions. Generally - with the notable exception of Unite – unions that participated in the 2015 survey returned fewer responses this time around, with some citing problems of survey fatigue. The ‘new’ unions generated an average of 40 responses each and were sufficiently numerous to bring the overall total in excess of that achieved last year. The timing of the survey, over Christmas, may also have affected response rates.

In addition to the union-led distributed surveys, 522 respondents who had participated in the 2015 survey and who had consented to further contact, were invited to take part in the survey. This process was managed using survey management software with periodic automated prompts issued to encourage participation. This aspect of the survey generated 228 completed responses, equivalent to a response rate of 41 per cent.

3.3 Demographic profile of learners

This section looks at the profile of union learners responding to the 2016 survey and uses a number of benchmarks to compare the cross sectional data. Appendix 3 (3.2 to 3.9) includes benchmark data for learners participating in the previous union learner survey (2015), community learners, Census data on the general employed population and Labour Force Survey data on those working in unionised workplaces. Data on community learners are taken from the “Community Learning Learner Survey” (CLLS) report (BIS, 2013). Data for the general population were derived from the Annual Population Survey (spanning a period from October 2014 to September 2015; accessed via NOMIS). Data from the Labour Survey are taken from the release January-March 2015 and report on the profile of the workforce where unions are present, reflecting the focus of union learning activity where ULRs only have statutory rights in unionised workplaces.

The **gender profile** of union learners is well balanced, albeit with a slight bias towards participation by women. This contrasts with the CLLS population which is heavily skewed towards female learners (76%). In the 2014/2015 and 2015/62016 learner surveys 53 per cent and 51 per cent respectively of respondents were female. This corresponds closely to the gender profile of workers in all unionised workplaces as reported in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) where 54 per cent of workers are female.

Union learners have an older **age profile** than the workforce as a whole, with more participants aged between 50 to 64 and fewer participants younger than 35 compared to the general population of employees. The share of learners aged 35 to 49 (36%) is roughly the same as the employed population (35%). The most recent union learner survey returned a similar age profile of respondents to the survey undertaken in 2015. The age profiles from the Labour Force Survey (unionised workplaces) and General Population (employees in employment) are very similar. In contrast, the two recent union learner surveys suggest that union learning is more likely to engage older workers.

The **ethnicity** of union learners responding to the 2016 survey is broadly comparable to the general population, with 89 per cent describing themselves as White (88% in the general population and 81% in the CLLS population). The proportion of learners from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities (BAME) in the community learning is much higher than the general population (17%) reflecting the focus of learning activity through that route. The union learner surveys in 2015/16 and 2014/15 report higher levels of participation by BAME learners (11% and 14% respectively) than the proportion of minority ethnic group workers in unionised workplaces (9%). English was not the **first language** for ten per cent of union learners, as opposed to 17 per cent of non-native English speakers within the CLLS population (17.4%), and eight per cent in the general population. Similar to the general population of employees, 14 per cent of union learners disclosed that they had a **disability**, a figure lower than the CLLS population (23%) and 22% in across unionised workplaces (LFS), although the questions from these surveys use a slightly wider definition around health conditions that limit capacity at work.

3.4 Employment characteristics

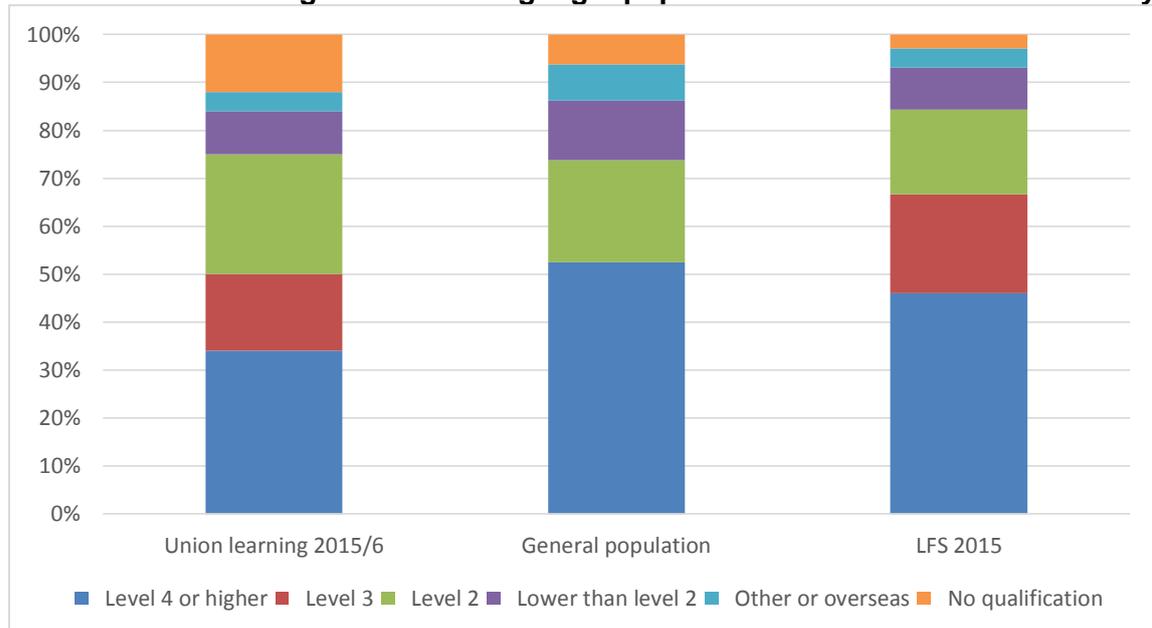
The learner survey was based on a self-completion questionnaire, which asked about the occupational characteristics of respondents, job type and wage rates. Such characteristics are not directly comparable to national surveys where data on occupations is coded by interviewers for example, using detailed Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes. However, accepting this caveat, it is notable that the profile of union learners contains a significantly larger proportion of staff in operative occupations, when compared to both the general population of employees and data from the Labour Force Survey on workers in unionised workplaces. **Twenty two per cent of union learners described themselves as operatives, as opposed to just six per cent of the general population.** Likewise, less than one tenth (9%) of learners stated that they were technical or associate professionals, a slightly lower proportion than for the general population as a whole (14%).

The employment characteristics of union learners was similar to both the previous survey and the general population, with two-thirds of (67%) respondents indicating they were employed full time, 17 per cent part time and 13 per cent self-employed. As with the last union learner survey, the vast majority of learners in employment were in a permanent job (85%). Furthermore, union learners were broadly evenly split between the public (46%) and private (49%) sectors, with a minority working for charities or in the voluntary sector (4%). The private sector accounted for a significantly smaller share of union learners than the general population (78%). The median wage was between £7.21 and £12.00 per hour before tax and other deductions. This range includes the national median hourly wage of £11.87 (ASHE). More importantly, a significant share of union learners earned more than £12 per hour (37%), compared, for example, to the 12 per cent of learners who earned less than £7.21 per hour.

3.5 Previous educational attainment

Respondents were asked about their qualifications prior to undertaking union learning (and subsequently the highest qualification attained as a result of union learning). The profile of learners' prior levels of educational attainment is shown in Figure 3.1 below (further detail in Appendix 3.6). The figure below illustrates that union learning engages learners with a wide range of prior education levels, with a third (32%) already holding qualifications at Level 4 or above. Yet the survey also illustrates the extent to which union learning is focused on engaging those with few or no qualifications. **The proportion of union learners with no formal prior qualification was 12 per cent, this is more than twice the level of the general population of employees (5%) and four times higher than the proportion of workers in unionised workplaces (3%).** Overall, 26 per cent of union learners had levels of prior educational attainment at Level 2 or below, compared to 21 per cent of the general population of workers and 16 per cent of workers in unionised workplaces.

Figure 3.1: Highest Qualification Profile (% in each category, ULF learners and benchmark data – general working age population and labour force survey)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

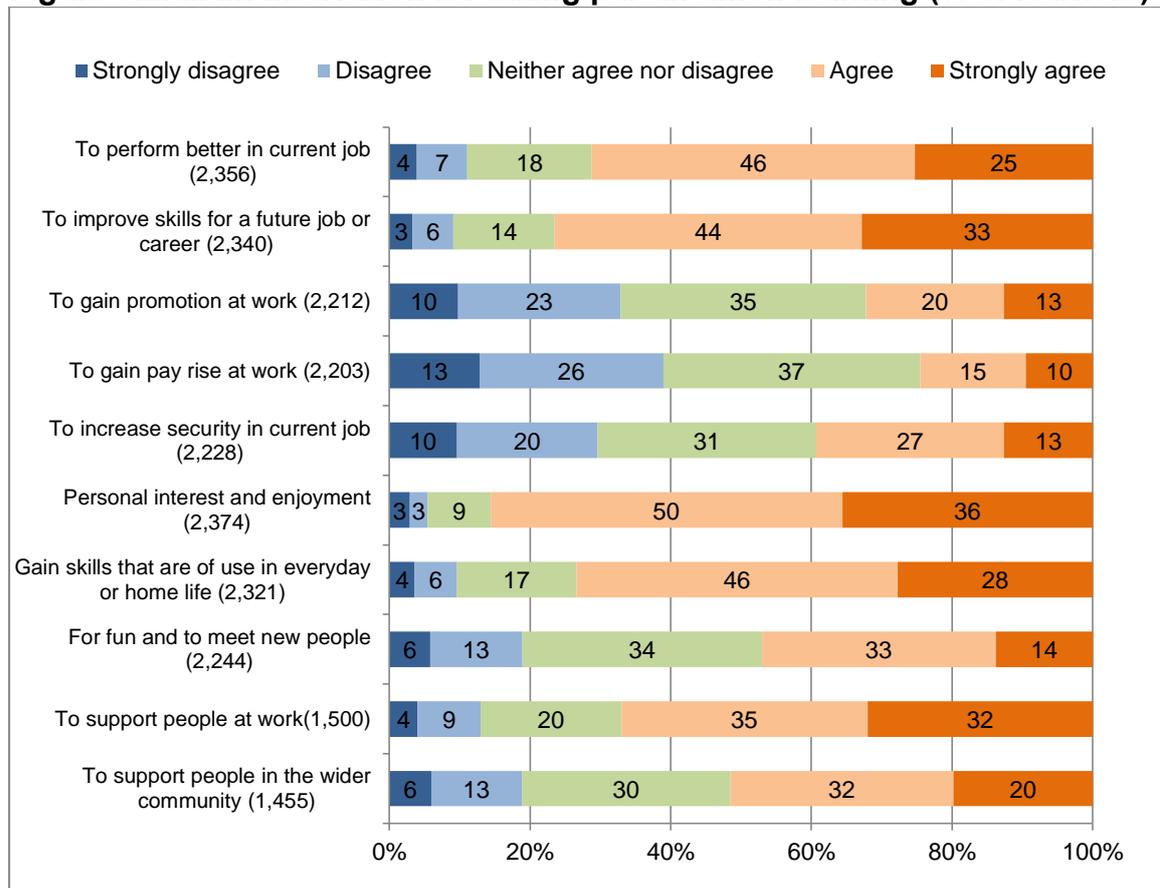
3.6 Motivations, facilitators and inhibitors

Prior to examining the nature and impact of union learning, this section presents the following contextual exploratory variables: personal motivations and prior experience of learning; barriers to learning; perceptions of employer support for learning and satisfaction with various aspects of their job; nature of engagement with their union; satisfaction with their experience of learning and the extent to which they would have done it without union support. Respondents were asked about their main motivation for taking part in union learning. Specifically, they were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that they had taken part in union learning to achieve a range of outcomes.

Figure 3.2 below shows the key motivations for taking part in union learning. In terms of overall levels of agreement with each statement learners were most likely to say that their main motivation for taking part in union learning was: for personal interest and enjoyment (86% either agreeing or strongly agreeing); to improve skills for a future job or career (77%); to gain skills that are useful in everyday or home life (74%) and to perform better in their current job (71%). Further details are shown in Appendix 3.11, demonstrating, for instance, that women were more likely than men to agree that they were motivated by almost the whole spectrum of outcomes. Young people were motivated predominantly by factors related to furthering or enhancing their employment situation. All motivations for taking part in union learning were subsequently clustered into three independent groups, based on the outcomes of factor analysis. These groups were as follows: (i) attaining transferable skills (to perform better in the current job or improve skills for future employment); (ii) gaining advantage in the current job (gaining promotion, pay rise or increasing job security); (iii) personal interest (from enjoyment through to socialising).

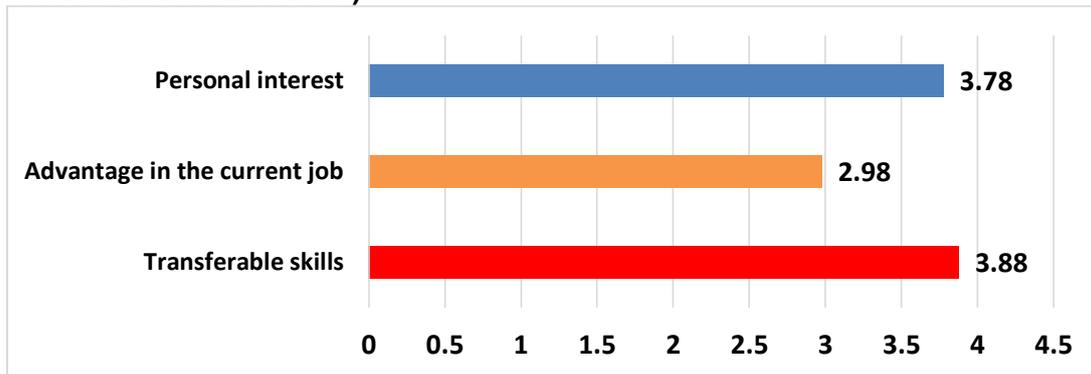
Figure 3.3 depicts mean scores for each group of motivations measured on a 5-point Likert scale. **It demonstrates that attaining transferrable skills prevails as a motivation for taking part in union learning, followed closely by personal interests, which are by far more important than a set of motivators associated with gaining advantage in the current job.**

Figure 3.2: Main motivation for taking part in union learning (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Figure 3.3: Motivating factors for taking part in union learning (average score on a scale of 0-5)



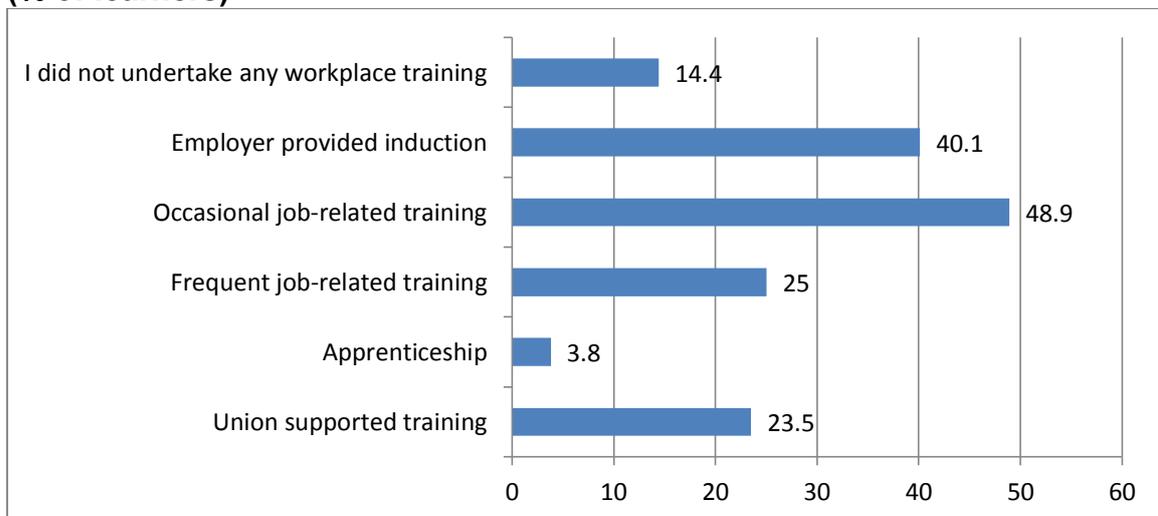
Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.7 Workplace learning context

Figure 3.4 below provides an illustration of the training activity previously provided at work, with a quarter of learners noting that they were ‘frequently involved’ in job-related training. Just a half reported (48.9%) reported occasional job-related training and 14 per cent that they had not undertaken any workplace training.

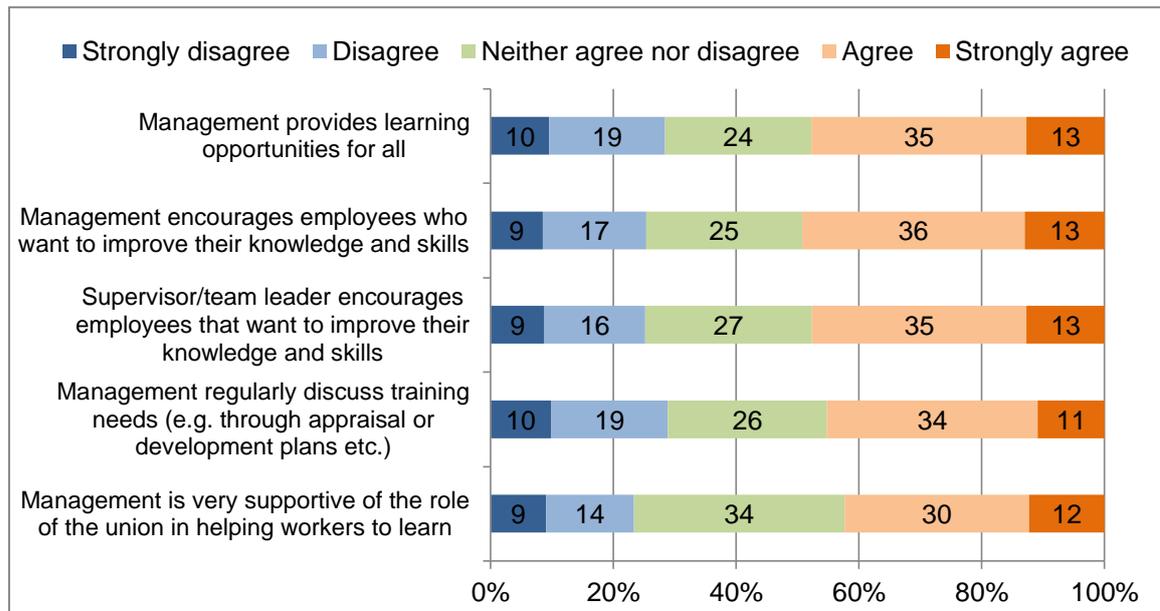
Figure 3.5 shows further detail of the workplace learning context. While a greater share of learners agreed that union learning was supported by management, there is no room for complacency, as a significant proportion of learners were either concerned with a lack of managerial support towards learning or not certain about its relevance.

Figure 3.4: Participation in training (five years prior to first union learning (% of learners))



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Figure 3.5: Support for training in the workplace (% of learners)



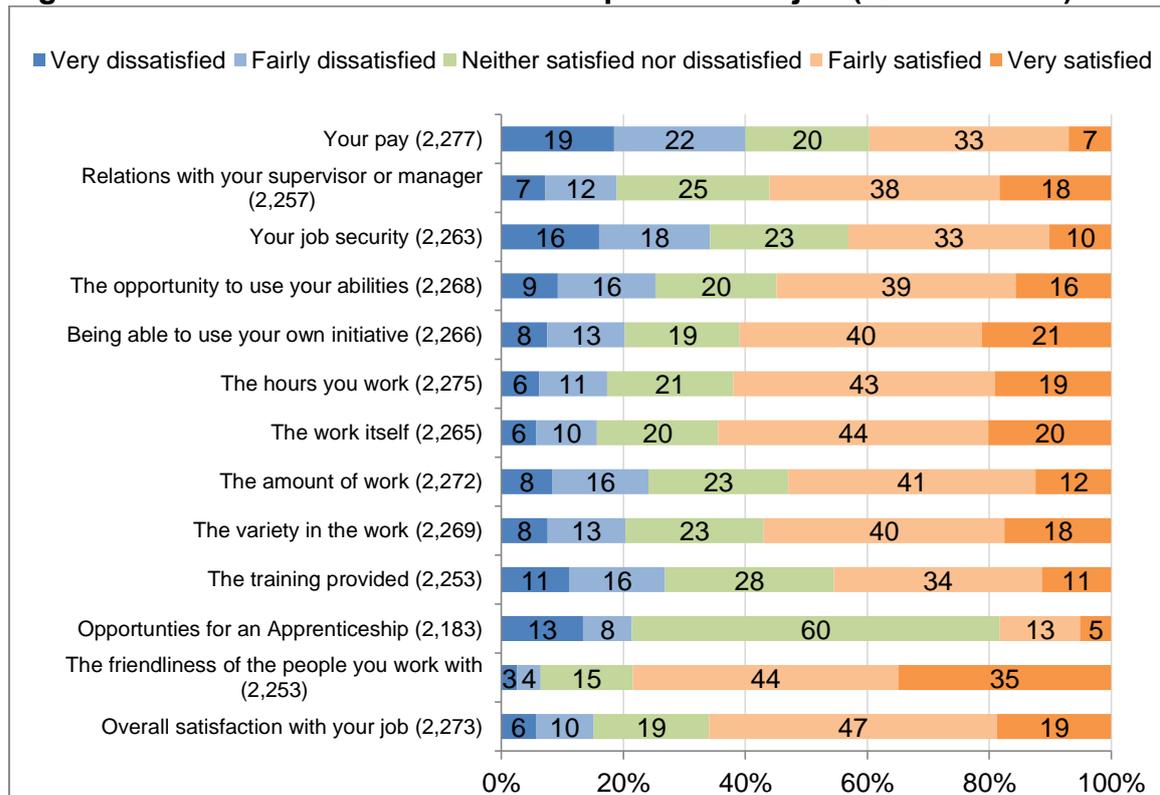
Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Examining the results by gender, occupation and sector allows for the following general conclusions: (i) women were more likely to agree that management had supported their learning than men; (ii) learners working for charities and the voluntary organisations and the public sector were more likely to claim they were supported in their learning than those from the private sector; (iii) finally, managers and senior officials as well as service, caring and administrative occupations were more likely to feel supported by management compared to a considerably lower level of perceived managerial support provided to skilled trades and operatives.

Respondents were also asked to what extent they were satisfied with various aspects of their job. Figure 3.6 below shows the results. Two-thirds were satisfied with their job (19% very satisfied), with the friendliness of the people they work with being by far the most satisfactory facet of work. Respondents were most likely to be dissatisfied with their pay (41%) and job security (34%), opportunity to use their abilities (25%), the amount of work (24%) and the training provided (27%).

There were relatively high levels of overall satisfaction across sectors, with voluntary sector or charity workers being the most satisfied employees. Also, women (70%) appear to be more satisfied than men (61%). Job satisfaction tends to decline with age and it is significantly higher for native English speakers (67%) than non-native speakers (59%). Likewise, white British and learners with a mixed ethnic background appeared to be more satisfied with their jobs than Asian, Asian British, Black and Black British. Higher level occupations were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. Similarly, high earners were more satisfied than low earners. Curiously, this did not apply to those in permanent employment, as such employees were less satisfied with their jobs than learners in temporary or fixed-term jobs.

Figure 3.6: Satisfaction with various aspects of the job (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.8 Barriers to learning

The most commonly reported barriers to learning, shown in Figure 3.7 below, were work pressure that makes it hard to take time off for learning, managers not allowing time off and a lack of management interest and support.

One-fifth of learners said that work pressure that made it hard to take time off for learning was a major problem, with little variation if any across demographic and economic characteristics. For example, men and women did not deviate substantially from each other in terms of self-reported work pressures. Older learners (23%), as opposed to young learners (9%), were more likely to experience work pressures that encroached on their willingness to take part in union learning. The same holds for Asian and Asian British (31%) learners compared to other (28%) ethnic groups and learners with a disability (29%) compared to those without (19%).

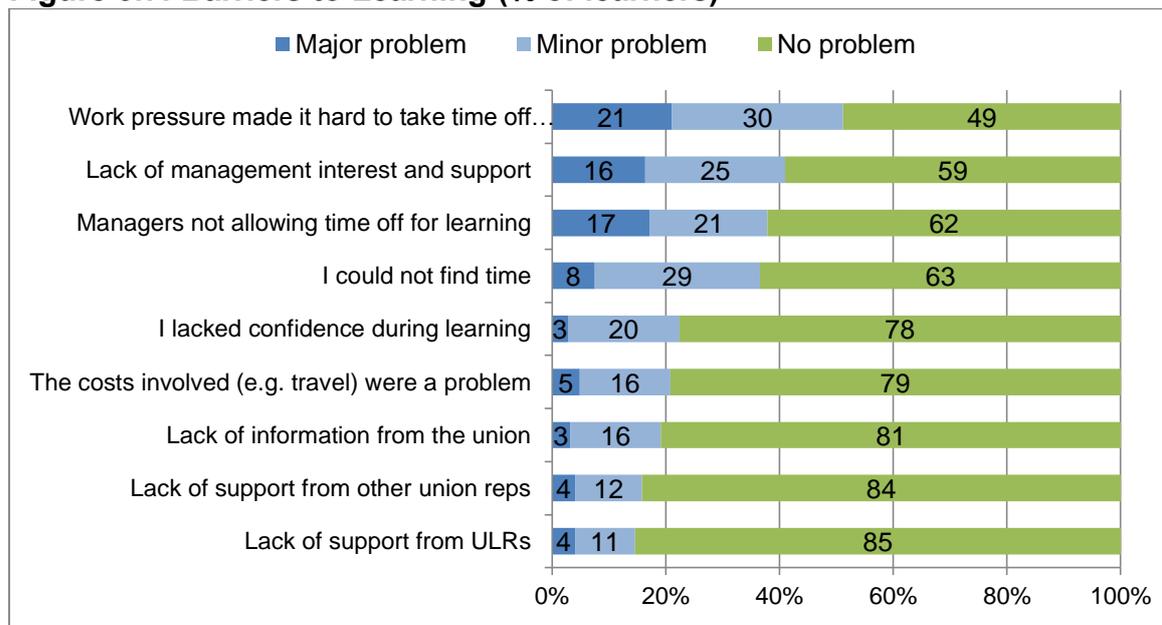
While a lack of confidence was not identified by learners as a major barrier, it did nevertheless cause some trouble for ethnic minorities (13%), involving also Asian and Asian British (9%). A pattern was observed among the unemployed (15%), agency workers (6%) and operatives (6%) alongside those on the lowest wages (9%), learners with no qualification (6%) or low qualifications (7%).

Women (8%) were more likely than men (6%) to say that they could not find the time for learning, as were those with ‘other’ ethnic origin (24%), learners with a disability (11%), the self-employed (13%), the unemployed (11%) and those in the ‘higher level skilled occupations’. The costs of learning were a major barrier for older learners over 65 years old (20%), the self-employed (12%), the unemployed (11%) and those in the lowest income category (11%).

One in six learners felt that a lack of managerial support was a major barrier to union learning. This rose to around one-fifth of operatives (23%), disabled learners (22%), and Asian or Asian British learners (20%). The percentage identifying this as a major problem rose with age and was more often reported by men (18%) than women (12%), as well as by learners in full time jobs (17%) compared to respondents in part time jobs (12%). Those with no (18%) or low qualifications (18%) were more likely to experience a lack of managerial support than those with higher levels of qualification.

Furthermore, one in six learners cited managers not allowing time off for learning as a major barrier to learning. Similar patterns pertain to various demographic and employment characteristics, but older learners aged 50 to 64 years (20%) were more likely to identify the foregoing as a major problem (compared to 4% of learners aged 16 to 24). The same holds for Asian or Asian British (27%), learners with a disability (25%), skilled trades (24%) and those with no (20%) or low qualifications (24%). A lack of information or support from Union Learning Representatives or other union representatives was not identified as a major problem by respondents, although the unemployed were more likely to mention such barriers.

Figure 3.7: Barriers to Learning (% of learners)

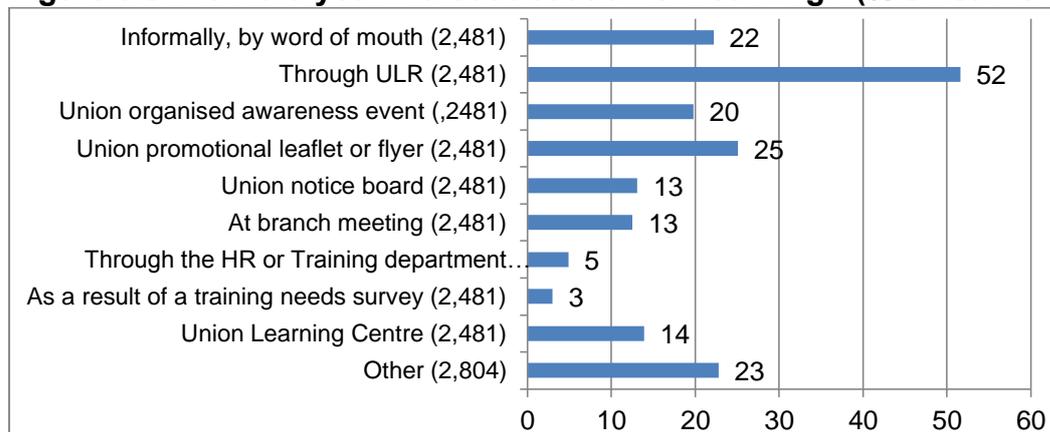


Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.9 Engagement in union learning

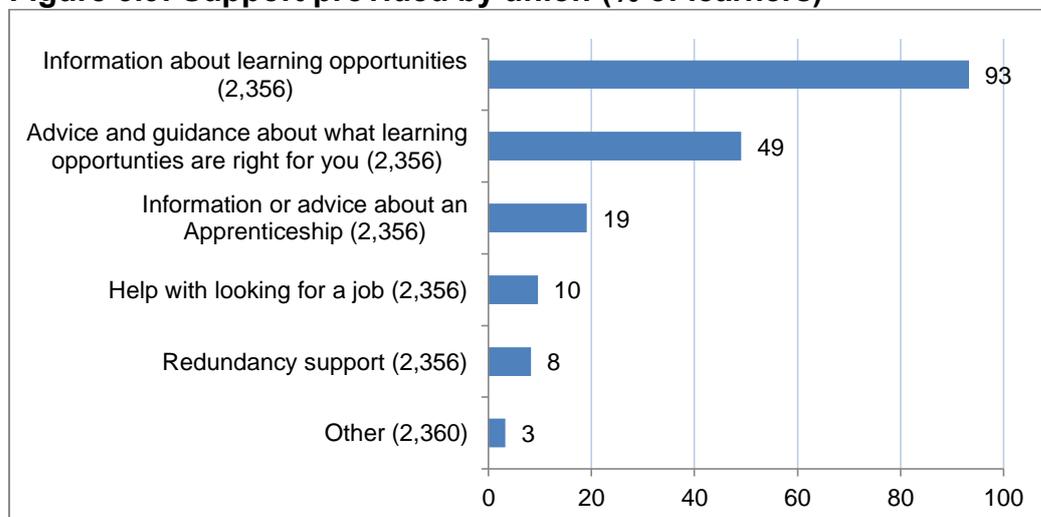
Union learners were asked if they were members of a trade union before taking part in union learning and if their membership status still holds. Four-fifths (80%) responded that they were a member before taking part, a share which rose to 89 per cent when measured straight after union learning. The relative membership gain achieved by trade unions was more substantial though, as 46.2 per cent of non-union members joined trade unions by the end of union learning. Appendix 3.12 details which unions saw an increase in membership. Figure 3.8 shows how learners found out about union learning opportunities. The most widely reported source, by some margin, was via ULRs. Just over half of respondents (52%) reported that they found out about union learning through a ULR. Following this, promotional leaflets were cited by a quarter (25%) and word of mouth by just over a fifth (22%). Just five per cent of respondents found out about union learning through their organisation's HR or training department.

Figure 3.8: How did you find out about union learning? (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Figure 3.9: Support provided by union (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Figure 3.9 shows the related support that was given to learners by their union, with general information about learning opportunities being the most frequently cited source (93%). For just under a fifth of respondents (19%) this included information or advice about an apprenticeship. Far fewer reported that the union provided support related to help looking for a job (10%) or redundancy support (8%).

3.10 Reasons for taking part in union learning

The majority of learning activity was job related (63%), with only a little over a third of respondents (37%) citing personal interests as a key motive for undertaking union learning. The focus on job-related learning was predominant across most learner groups with the exception of learners with no prior qualifications (52%) or low qualifications (55%), Asian and Asian British (55%) and other ethnic origin (54%), where the learner’s first language was not English (56%), retired learners (78%), those employed through an agency (54%), operatives (56%), and lower paid workers earning £6.71 to £7.20 (51%). Furthermore, 29 per cent of all learning was undertaken in normal working time. Roughly the same proportion of learners (26%) had to spend personal time on training. Nearly a half of respondents (45%) were given time off work for learning but still had to devote part of their individual time on training. Table 3.1 shows that there was a statistically significant association between the main motive for learning and the time during which learning activity was undertaken. It was twice as likely for learning to take place during normal working hours, provided it was job-related. Yet, merely a third of union learners who stated that training was predominantly job related had undertaken it within normal working hours solely. More than four in ten learners in both categories (job-related and personal interest) had to spend at least some of their personal time on learning.

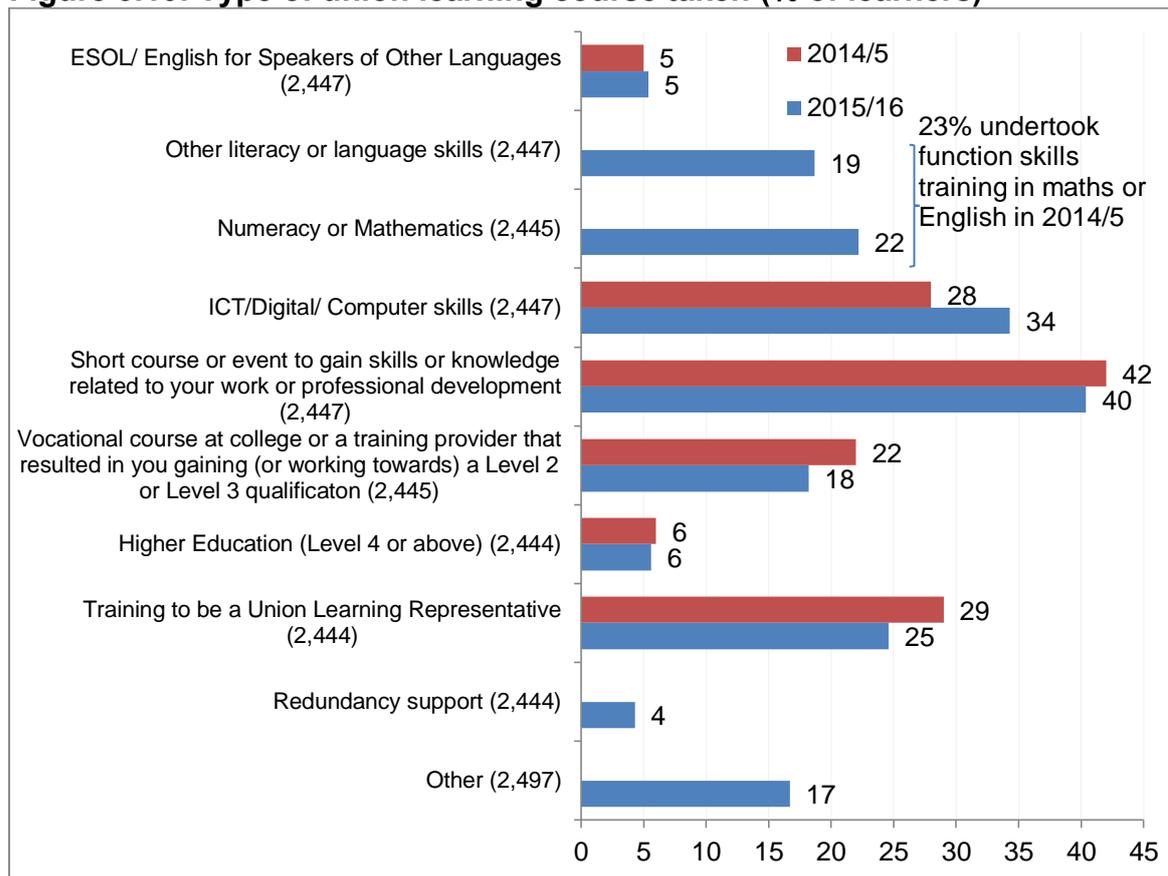
Was union learning mainly...	Union learning undertaken during ...		
	Working hours	Own time	Both
Job-related	35.4%	20.3%	44.3%
Personal interest	18.4%	34.2%	47.4%

Note: Pearson’s chi-square test is statistically significant at p<0.001

3.11 Union learning activities

The survey explored the kind(s) of learning that respondents (union learners) had undertaken, how often they had taken part and when they had last participated. This section also examines learners’ main motivation for engaging in union learning. Figure 3.10 shows that the most common types of learning undertaken by respondents were: short courses or events to gain skills or knowledge related to work or professional development (40%); ICT/Digital/Computer skills (34%); training to be a Union Learning Representative (25%); numeracy or mathematics (22%); other literacy or language skills (18%) and vocational courses at college or training provider that resulted in (or working towards) a Level 2 or Level 3 qualification (18%). These proportions were similar to those identified in the 2015 union learner survey. Roughly half of respondents (48%) had participated in more than one type of learning.

Figure 3.10: Type of union learning course taken (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.12 Frequency of union learning

As Table 3.2 indicates, nearly three quarters (73%) of respondents had participated in union learning within the last 12 months, with a tiny minority (14%) having taken part in union learning over two years ago. Only 30 per cent of respondents had taken part in one learning episode. The majority of respondents (52%) were ‘frequent learners’, as they had taken part in more than three episodes of union learning, with one-fifth of learners having done so more than six times. Table 3.2 reveals an important tendency, wherein frequent learners (those who had taken part in more than three episodes of learning) had undertaken their previous learning activity within the last six months, a propensity that does not pertain to those learners who had taken part in just one or two episodes of learning.

Table 3.2: Frequency of union learning (% of learners in each category)

When last took part in union learning...	Number of times taken part in union learning			
	Once	Twice	Three to six times	More than six times
Within last month	20.0%	18.2%	28.2%	37.6%
Between 1 and 6 months ago	25.5%	26.1%	33.7%	29.3%
Between 7 and 12 months ago	18.8%	20.1%	17.4%	17.8%
Between 13 and 24 months ago	15.0%	20.5%	12.2%	5.9%
Over 24 months ago	20.7%	15.1%	8.5%	9.4%

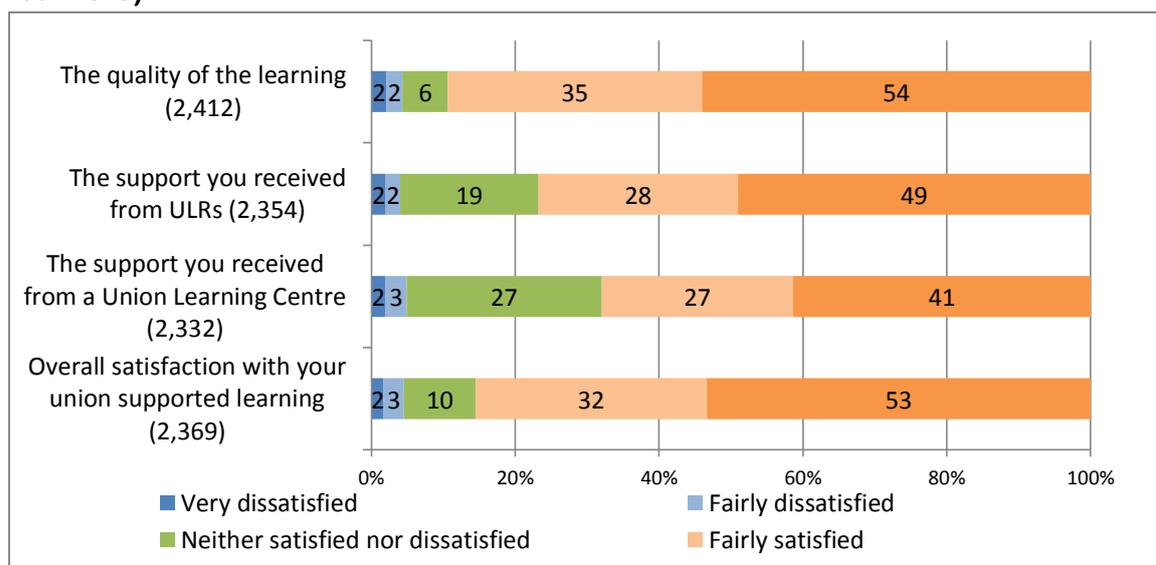
Note: Pearson’s chi-square test is statistically significant at $p < 0.001$

Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.13 Satisfaction with union learning support

Figure 3.11 shows the level of satisfaction with union learning. Overall, most respondents were satisfied with various aspects of union learning. Nearly nine in ten (89%) reported that they were satisfied with the quality of the learning, while more than three quarters (77%) were satisfied with the support that they received from ULRs. While proportions were small, learners who were generally dissatisfied with their learning were most likely to belong to the following categories: Black or Black British (6%); other ethnic minority (18%); aged over 65 (6%); employed through an agency (6%); other occupation (7%).

Figure 3.11: Satisfaction with aspects of union learning support (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.14 Qualifications gained

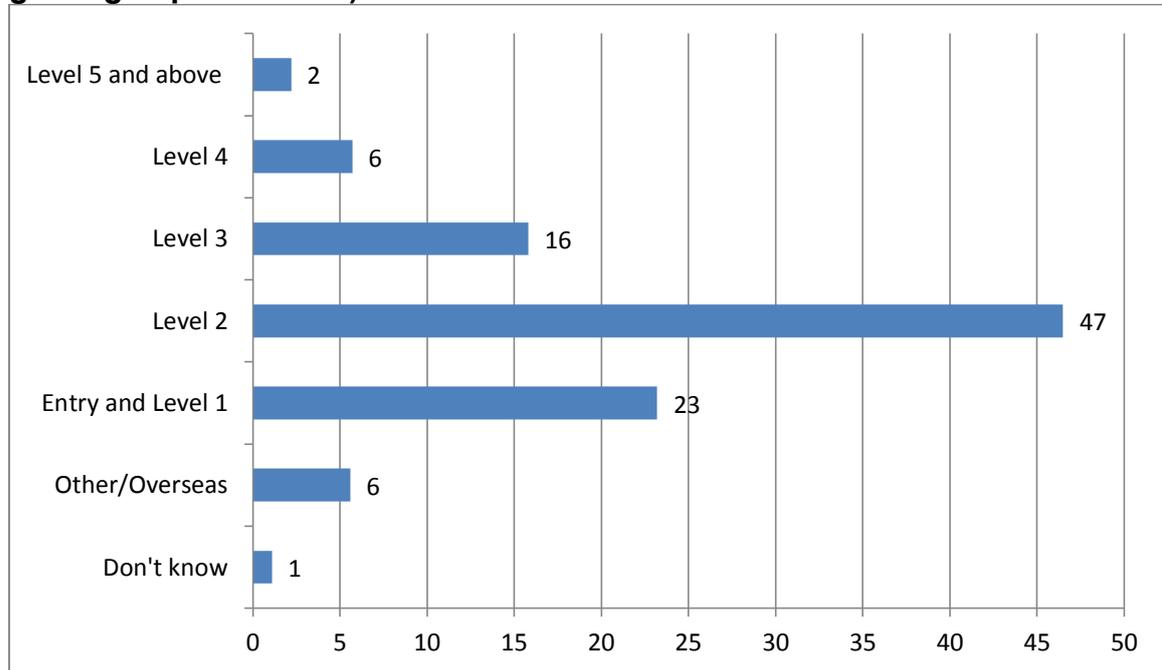
Over half (55%) of respondents gained a qualification as a result of union learning, which was the same as the proportion of learners who gained a formal qualification in 2014/15 (56%). Figure 3.12 shows the level of qualification gained, with the largest proportion acquiring a Level 2 qualification, reported by just under half of respondents (47%). Just under a quarter (24%) of those that gained a qualification, reported a gain at Level 3 or higher.

Appendix 3.16 shows that, in terms of demographics, the proportion gaining a qualification was higher for men (59%), young learners (61%), learners with a disability (64%) and Asian or Asian British (62%) learners. Learners of mixed (49%) or Black or Black British (50%) ethnic origin were the group least likely to gain a qualification.

Appendix 3.17 shows that the group most likely to gain a qualification were those earning between £7.21 and £12.00 per hour. Qualifications were also more likely

to be acquired by learners working as operatives, 'other' occupations, skills trades and services and caring or administrative occupations than those in managerial or senior officials, professionals or associate professionals and technicians. Appendix 3.18 shows that the self-employed and agency workers were less likely to gain formal qualifications than those with other types of employment status.

Figure 3.12: Highest qualification gained from union learning (% of learners gaining a qualification)

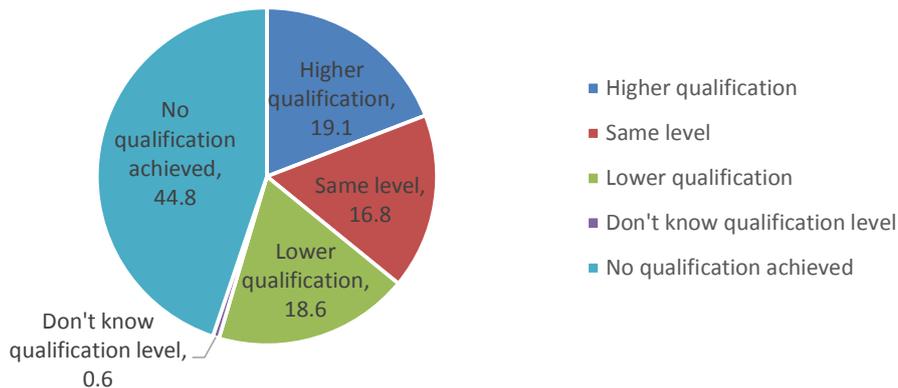


Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey
 Base: 1,346 learners gaining qualification

3.15 Qualification progression

Figure 3.13 shows qualification progression in terms of the distribution of learning by the level of learning undertaken in comparison to learners' previous highest level of qualification. Looking at the total sample (all learners including those taking courses that led to a qualification and those not learning towards a qualification), broadly equal proportions gained a qualification at a higher level than their existing qualification (19%), at the same level (17%) or lower (19%). In the 2015 survey 26 per cent attained a higher qualification level, while 25 per cent gained the same level of qualification or lower, 13 per cent were unsure about the qualification gained and 37 per cent had not gained any formal qualification. However, caution must be taken in interpreting these results, as in the 2015 learner survey, respondents themselves were asked whether qualification was at a higher level than the one they had prior to union learning. For the current survey, the learning progression variable was derived from responses to questions about qualifications held before engaging in union learning and the highest qualification obtained as a result of union support.

Figure 3.13: Qualification higher, same or lower than prior learning level (% of all learners)

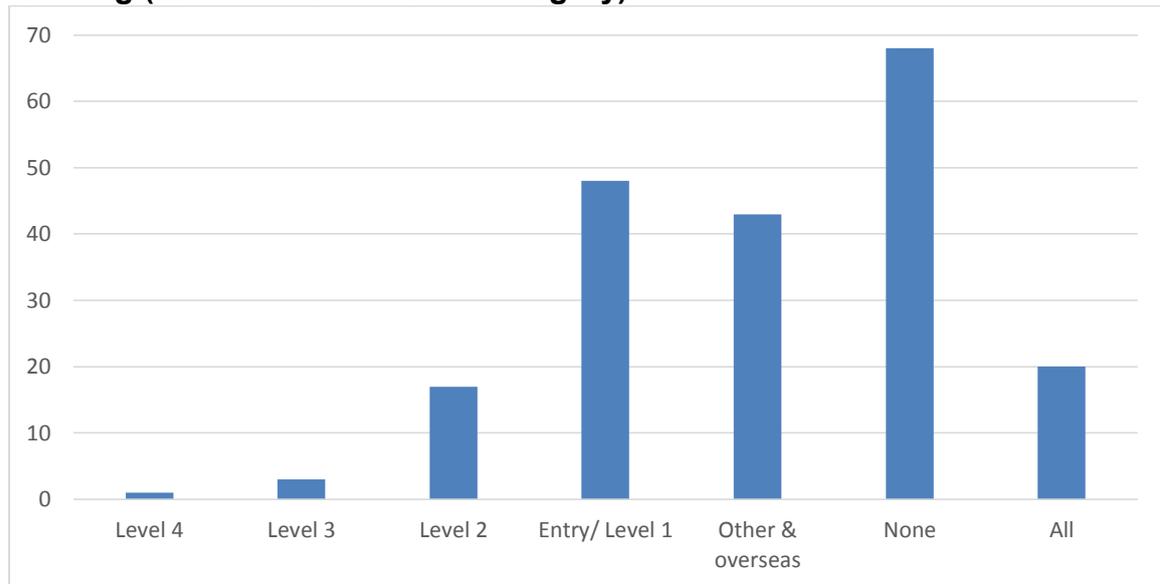


Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Learners undertaking union learning that was mainly for personal interest were more likely to gain a qualification (62%) than those whose learning was mainly job-related (50%). Learners undertaking courses for personal interest were also more likely to achieve a higher qualification than their existing qualification (24%), compared to 15 per cent for job-related learners. Appendix 3.19 shows the types of learning associated with qualification level gain. The courses most likely to result in qualification gain for union learners were: English Literacy (44%); vocational courses at a college (43%); numeracy (37%); ESOL (28%) and higher education courses (27%). Appendix 3.18 shows the demographic profile of those attaining higher levels of qualification through union learning. Men were slightly more likely than women to achieve a qualification uplift: 21 per cent of all male union learners increased their qualification compared to 19 per cent for women. However, this was because men were more likely to undertake courses that led to a formal qualification. Interrogating the data further demonstrates that the progress of learners on courses that led to a formal qualification was slightly more likely to take place among women (30%) compared to men (27%).

Figure 3.14 demonstrates clearly that those with no or low levels of prior qualification were substantially more likely to achieve an uplift in their qualification level as a result of union learning. This was the case for just over two-thirds (68%) of learners with no prior qualification and for just under half (47%) of those with entry or Level 1 qualifications. More detailed cross-tabulation of learning by qualification bands is shown in Appendix 3.18.

Figure 3.14: Qualification progression by highest qualification before union learning (% of learners in each category)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

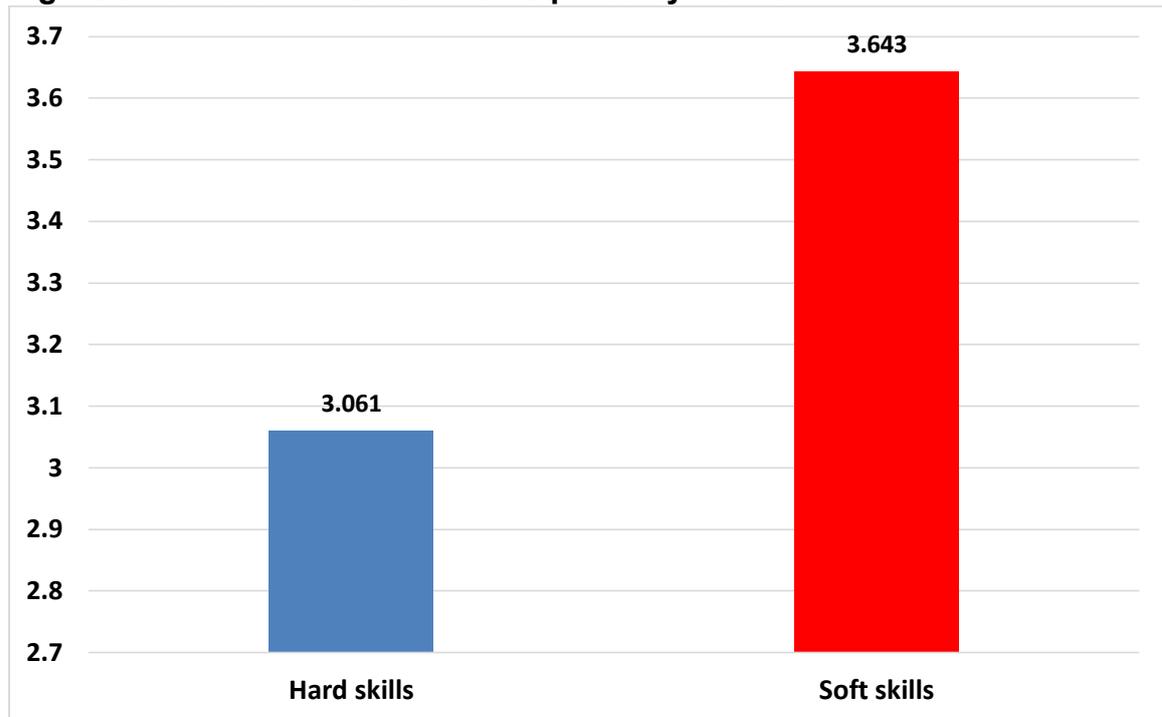
3.16 Skills gained and their use

This section looks at the skills gained by union learners, with a specific focus on transferable skills that can be applied in different circumstances and workplaces. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that union learning had helped them develop a range of skills. Appendix 3.20 shows further detail of the skills gained. Overall, around three-quarters (74%) agreed they had developed self-confidence or sense of what they can achieve (28% strongly agreed with this statement), 71 per cent agreed they had developed skills for their professional development (28% strongly agreeing) and 61 per cent that they had gained planning and organisation skills. Learners who had gained a qualification were more likely than those that had not to agree that they had developed a range of skills. Unsurprisingly, the type of skills developed was closely linked to the type of learning undertaken.

Some skills, such as self-confidence, were acquired by all learners, while types of learning focused on specific skill sets (such as ICT) produced more concentrated skills outcomes (see Appendix 3.21).

The skills gained by learners were split into two independent categories (based on factor analysis): **hard skills** include vocational, literacy, numeracy, language and IT skills and **soft skills** composed of self-confidence, coaching, professional development and planning skills. Figure 3.15 illustrates that learners, on average, were marginally more likely to report acquiring soft skills (a factor of 3.64) than hard skills (a factor of 3.06) as a result of union learning.

Figure 3.15: Hard and soft skills acquired by learners



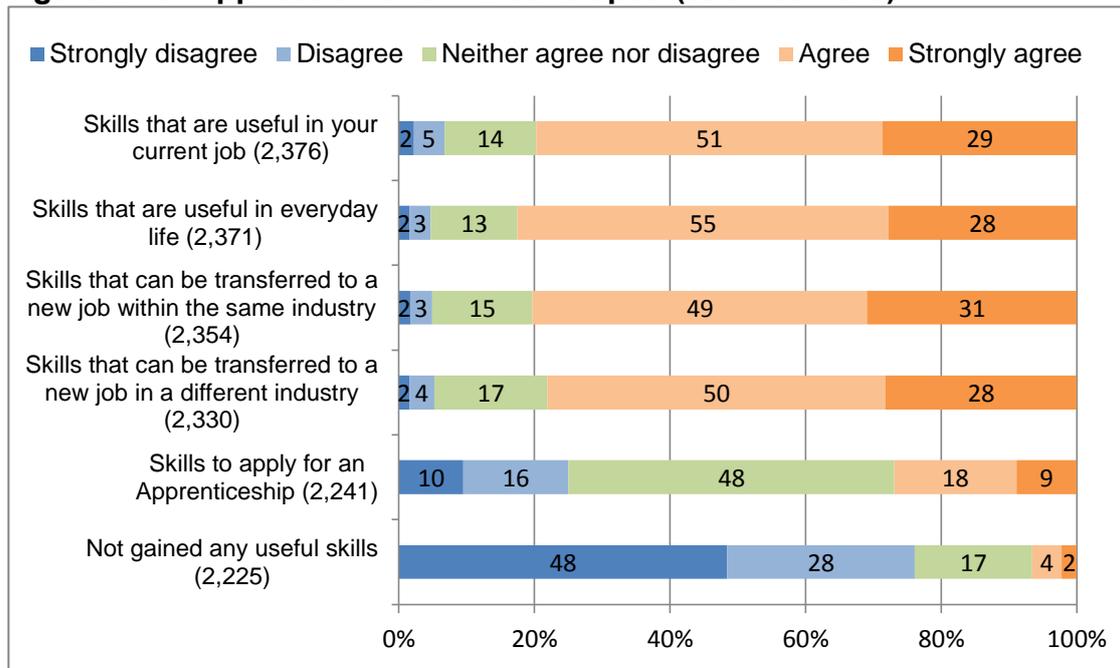
Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.17 Application of skills to work

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with statements describing how they had utilised the skills they had acquired or developed through union learning. Figure 3.16 shows the responses. Four-fifths (80%) of respondents felt that union learning had given them skills that were useful in their current job (compared to 74% in the previous survey). Furthermore, 83 per cent agreed that they had developed skills that were useful in everyday life; 80 per cent agreed they had developed skills that could be transferred to a new job within the same industry; 78 per cent agreed skills could be transferred to a new job in a different industry; 27 per cent agreed they had gained skills to apply for an Apprenticeship; and, just six per cent agreed they had not gained any useful skills.

Again, these results were higher for those who had attained a qualification through union learning. The proportion of respondents gaining skills that they might use in their current job and / or to get a new job / change career increases steadily with the number of learning episodes they had engaged in (Appendix 3.25).

Figure 3.16: Application of skills developed (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

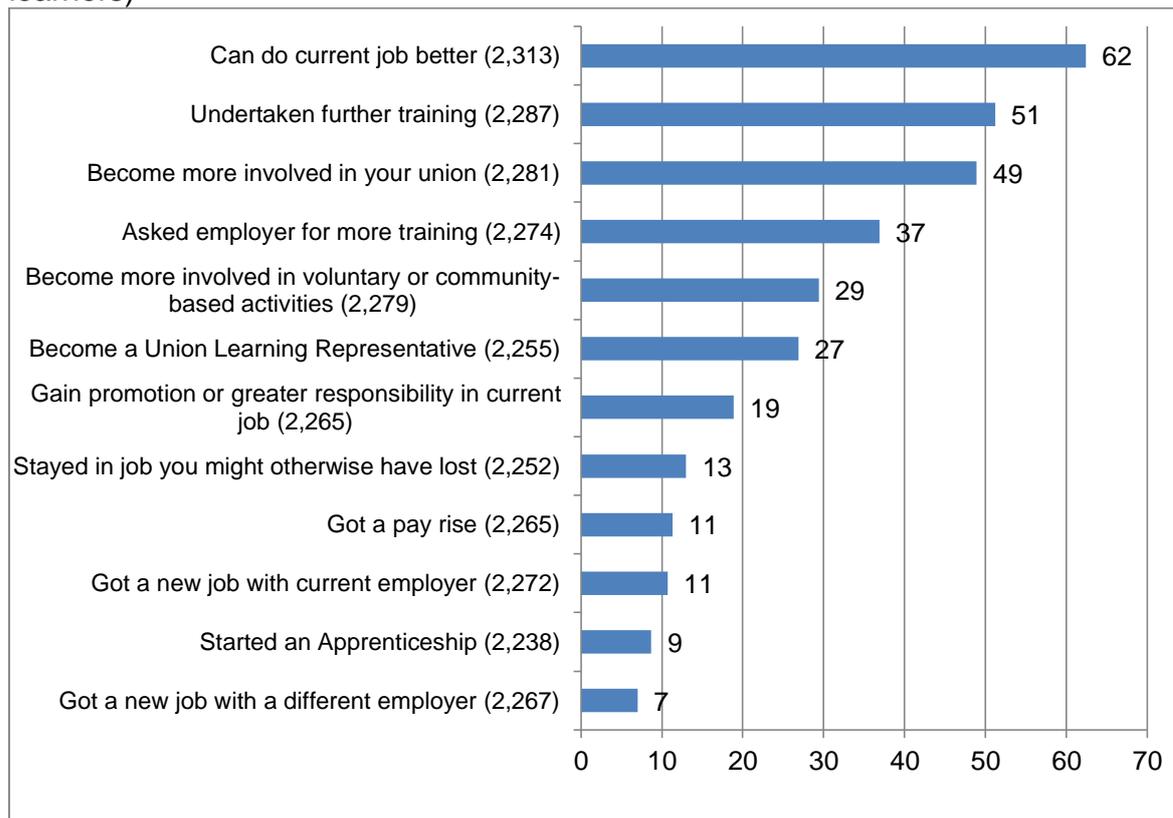
3.18 Outcomes of learning

In this section we look at the outcomes that result from union learning, distinguishing between changes in circumstances that respondents identified as having “actually happened” on the basis of a binary “yes’ / ‘no” response, referred to as “hard outcomes” and changes in the capacity or disposition that respondents identified as having occurred to a greater or lesser extent using a sliding scale, from “completely agree” to “completely disagree”, referred to as “soft outcomes”.

3.19 Hard outcomes

Figure 3.17 shows that, on the basis of a binary ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response, the most common hard outcome of participation in union learning was that participants are able to do their existing job better, cited by 62 per cent of respondents. This was greater than the 40 per cent of respondents claiming the same outcome during the 2015 survey. Half of learners had also undertaken further training (51%) and become more involved in their union (49%). Over a third had asked their employer for more training (37%). Less than one in ten (9%) claimed to have started an apprenticeship as an outcome of union learning. Similarly, the impact of union learning on an individual’s pay was relatively small, with just 11 per cent claiming to have received a pay rise as an outcome of union learning, and a little under a fifth (19%) claimed to have been promoted as a result of union learning. The returns for unions themselves seem to be slightly more favourable, with just over a quarter (27%) of respondents reporting to have become ULRs as a consequence of engaging in union learning.

Figure 3.17: Hard outcomes as a result of participating in union learning (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Table 3.3 below shows that these outcomes were enhanced by multiple episodes of learning. Such an association holds up for all hard outcomes of learning, except for learners' take-up of apprenticeship programmes - an inconsistency that is most probably predicated upon the age profile of learners. Other than that, frequent learners, those who had taken part in three and more episodes of learning, accounted for over 60 per cent of successful cases with regard to most of the hard outcomes of learning. For those reporting they had received a pay rise as a result of union learning, this was the case for just under one in ten (7%) of those that undertaken just one episode of union learning, but for nearly a fifth (19%) of those that had undertaken six or more episodes. Similarly, while just under one in ten (9%) of those that undertaken one episode of union learning became ULRs as a result, this increased to more than half (54%) of those that had undertaken six or more episodes of union learning. Further detail of the profile of learners achieving 'hard' outcomes are contained in Appendices 3.23 to 3.24.

Table 3.3: Hard outcomes by episodes of learning (% in each category)

Number of times taken part in union learning	Hard outcomes											
	Get new job with current employer	Get new job with different employer	Got a pay rise	Gain promotion or greater responsibility	Can do current job better	Stayed in job might otherwise have lost	Undertaken further training	Started an Apprenticeship	Asked employer for more training	Become more involved in your union	Become a union learning rep	Become more involved in voluntary or community groups
Once	6%	4%	7%	10%	51%	9%	26%	8%	25%	26%	9%	13%
Twice	10%	7%	12%	17%	62%	12%	48%	8%	35%	42%	21%	21%
Three to six times	11%	7%	12%	23%	70%	15%	65%	8%	42%	60%	35%	38%
More than six times	19%	11%	19%	31%	73%	21%	79%	11%	53%	80%	54%	52%

Note: Pearson's chi-square test is statistically significant at p<0.001

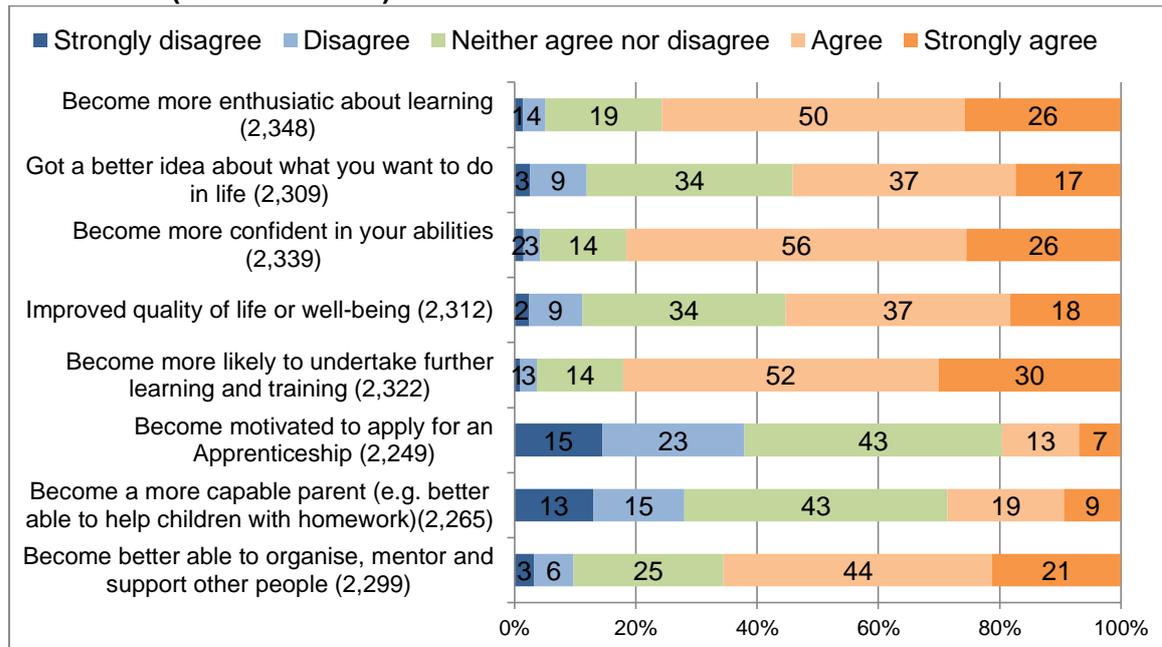
Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.20 'Soft' outcomes

Figures 3.18 and 3.19 show the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed that a range of soft outcomes had occurred as a result of their participation in union learning. It shows that three quarters or more of all learners agreed or strongly agreed that union learning had resulted in them becoming more confident in their abilities (82%), more likely to undertake further learning and training (79%) and more enthusiastic about learning (74%). Two-thirds (66%) agreed or strongly agreed that they were better able to organise, mentor and support other people and half agreed or strongly agreed that union learning had improved their quality of life and well-being (51%).

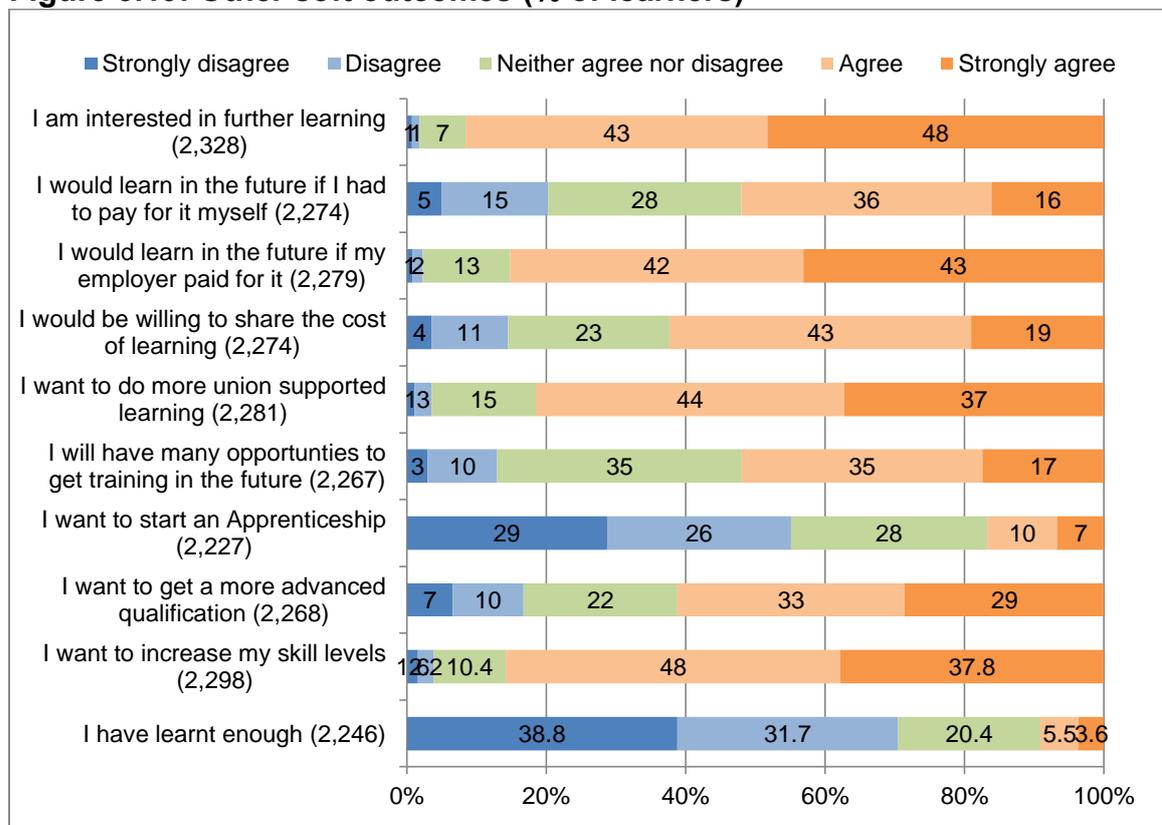
There appeared to be a high demand for future learning. Around eight in ten (81%) respondents reported that they were interested in further union learning and an even higher percentage would be interested in any further learning (91%). Just over half reported they would be prepared to learn further, even if they had to pay for it themselves. That said, an even higher proportion (85%) would be willing to do so if the learning was paid for by their employer. These results were again higher for those that achieved a qualification uplift.

Figure 3.18: Proportion of respondents who attained specified soft outcomes (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Figure 3.19: Other soft outcomes (% of learners)

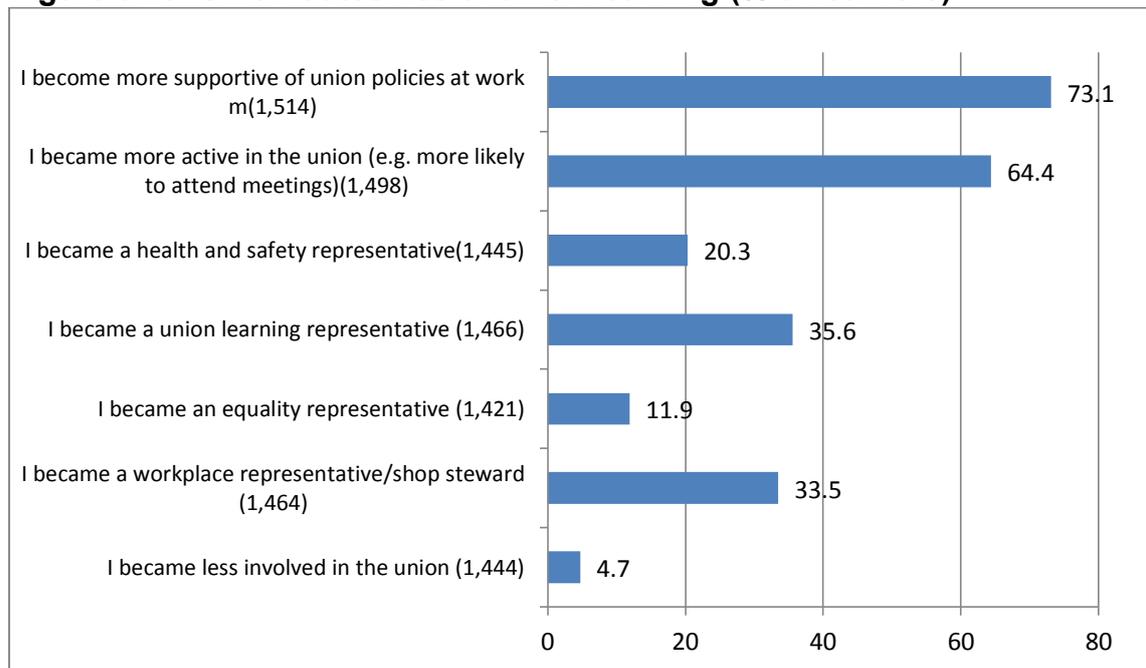


Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.21 Union related impacts of union learning

Figure 3.20 reports the impact of union learning on union-related outcomes. Overall, just over half (56%) reported that union learning had at least some impact on their participation with their union. The most common response, reported by just under three quarters of those responding positively (73%), was that union learning had led to the respondent simply becoming more supportive of union policies at work. But there was also some evidence of increased activity in unions. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of those reporting an impact stated they were now more active in their union, and more likely to attend union meetings and so forth. In a third of cases this led to union learners taking up union representative roles, with 36 per cent becoming a ULR and 34 per cent a workplace shop steward. There were lower reported levels for those taking up health and safety or equality representative roles. Very few respondents reported (5%) that the impact had been negative and that they were now less active in their unions.

Figure 3.20: Union outcomes of union learning (% of learners)

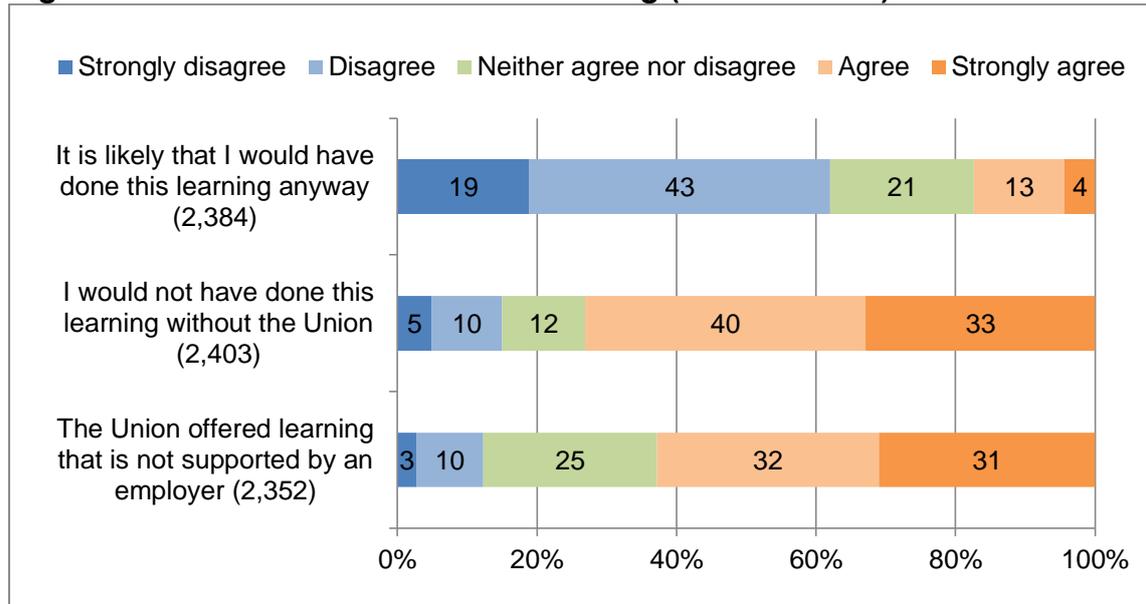


Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

3.22 The deadweight and added value of union learning

The assessment of outcomes needs to be tempered with the recognition that outcomes might be achieved as a result of other factors. Learners were asked firstly the extent to which they agreed “It is likely that I would have done this learning anyway,” and then the extent to which they agreed with the statement that outcomes achieved were as a direct result of their participation in union learning. In terms of deadweight, Figure 3.21 shows that estimates range from between 13 per cent to 17 per cent depending on criteria. The vast majority of respondents (63%) disagreed that it was likely that they would have done the learning anyway. In contrast, around three-quarters (73%) agreed that they would not have done the learning without the union, while nearly two-thirds (63%) reported that the union offered learning that was not supported by their employer.

Figure 3.21: Added value of union learning (% of learners)



Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

When the results are disaggregated, there was a very slight difference by gender: female (16.5%), male (17.8%). Deadweight was a little higher for younger, 19 to 24 years (19%), and 25 to 34 (21%), and the oldest learners (25%), compared to workers aged 50-64 years (15%). Deadweight was also higher among Black British (24%) compared to White British (16%) and among those whose first language was not English compared to native English speakers. There was a slightly lower deadweight for those in the public sector (15%) compared to the private sector (18%) or voluntary/charity organisations (18%). Deadweight was also higher amongst lowest paid workers: less than £6.70 (22%) and between £6.71 and £7.20 per hour (23%). In terms of type of learning, there were similar levels of deadweight for job related (17%) and learning for personal interest (18%). Appendix 3.33 cross-tabulates learner deadweight responses with specific hard outcomes, showing that those that got a new job were slightly more likely to report that they might have done the learning undertaken anyway (24% for those obtaining a job with a new employer and 20% of those gaining a new job with the existing employer).

3.23 Longitudinal analysis of learner surveys

For the first time, the evaluation incorporated a longitudinal element whereby respondents who took part in the 2014/15 survey and who consented to further contact were invited via email to take part in the latest survey. Longitudinal analyses are methodologically superior to cross-sectional analyses in identifying changes over time within a particular population. In total, 510 invitation emails were successfully delivered, generating 231 completed questionnaires. This represents a response rate of 45 per cent. Most (75%) of these respondents had taken part in union learning within the last 12 months which is broadly when the previous survey took place. Half (50%) had taken part in union learning within the last 6 months.

The respondents to the longitudinal survey were broadly similar to those taking part in the main survey in terms of their demographic characteristics, but were older

on average, with 65 per cent of the longitudinal learners reporting they were aged 50 and over compared to 44 per cent of the main survey respondents. Participants in the longitudinal study were more likely to report a disability (22% compared to 13% in the main learner survey). Their employment characteristics were also different from those reported in the main learner survey, with the most significant differences observed in relation to full time employment (75% compared to 67% in the main survey), 'high-skill' occupations (45% compared to 35%), public sector employees (57% compared to 45%) and learners earning more than £12.01 an hour (50% compared to 36%).

Two key conjectures emerging from the descriptive statistics of the main learner survey were further corroborated through the analysis of the longitudinal sample of learners. These concern the **frequency of union learning and qualification progression**, with an underlying assumption that frequent learners, those who had taken part in multiple episodes of learning, and learners who had attained a formal qualification derived significantly greater benefits from union learning. To investigate this further, frequent learners were separated from those who had taken part in only one or a maximum of two episodes of learning. Likewise, those learners that had gained a formal qualification as a result of union learning were separated from those learners who had gained no qualification whatever.

Table 3.4 shows that the majority of learners (67%) within the longitudinal study were frequent learners who had taken part in three or more episodes of learning. This contrasts to 19 per cent of newcomers, with almost no prior experience of union learning, and 14 per cent of learners who had taken part in two episodes of union learning. The distribution of learners was more even for qualification progression, in that 28 per cent of participants had gained a higher level of qualification than the one they possessed prior to union learning. Those who attained a formal qualification but at the same or lower level than the one they already had constituted 40 per cent of the longitudinal sample, while 32 per cent of learners had not gained any qualification as a result of union learning. Both measurements, of learning frequency and qualification progression, were obtained during the first wave of the longitudinal study.

Table 3.4: Qualification progression and learning frequency in the longitudinal sample

	Qualification progression
Higher than prior to union learning	27.8%
At or below the existing qualification	40.1%
No qualification gained	32.1%
	Learning frequency
Once	18.8%
Twice	14%
Three times and more	67.2%
	Sample size: 251

Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

The longitudinal sample exhibited exponential progression with regard to hard outcomes of learning. Table 3.5 shows that the share of learners who attained hard outcomes increased between the first and concluding episode of learning, with a more than twofold rise for those who gained a pay increase. **These statistics imply that learning frequency may indeed be highly beneficial for learners,** an assumption that we corroborated further by turning to soft outcomes of learning.

Table 3.5: Hard outcomes of learning (a longitudinal perspective)

	Positive after the first episode	Positive after the final episode
New job	15.1%	18.3%
Pay rise	5.2%	11.1%
Promotion	13.5%	20.2%

Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to investigate whether a positive impact of qualification progression and learning frequency on soft outcomes of learning, sketched out above in the descriptive analysis of the main learner survey, holds up longitudinally. Table 3.6 contains the output of repeated measures ANOVA, a statistical technique that estimates significant differences between the groups of participants by taking into consideration that such differences are manifested at different points in time. The upper portion of the table reports general coefficients, which taken together conform to the assumption that obtaining a formal qualification, notably if such a qualification level is higher than the existing one, is associated with significantly better soft outcomes of union learning. The same holds for the frequency variable in that frequent learners appear to be better off than those participants for whom union learning is a one-off experience. That is, **both qualification progression and learning frequency increased the likelihood of becoming more self-confident, enthusiastic about training, being able to mentor other people etc.**

The bottom portion of Table 3.6 reports more nuanced findings by comparing the above-mentioned groups of learners to each another. **It demonstrates that regardless of progression, attaining a formal qualification level as a result of union learning was considerably better for soft outcomes than not gaining any qualification.** It was also the case that those who progressed in their qualification level were better off than learners who obtained the same or lower qualification level compared to the one they already had. The results were slightly different in relation to the frequency of participation in union learning. There was no significant difference with regard to soft outcomes of learning between one and two episodes of learning. **Those who had taken part in three and more episodes of learning were much better off in terms of attained levels of self-confidence, motivation and other soft outcomes.**

Table 3.6: Learning Outcomes: repeated measures ANOVA			
	Mean Sq	F value	p value
Qualification progression	16.82	36.56	1.56e-15 ***
Frequency of union learning	14.60	31.73	1.09e-13 ***
	Post-Hoc Test (qualification progression)		
	<i>Difference between the group means</i>		
The same or lower qualification / No qualification	0.395***		
Higher qualification / No qualification	0.659***		
Higher qualification / The same or lower qualification	0.264**		
	Post-Hoc Test (learning frequency)		
Twice / Once	0.150		
More than three times / Once	0.539***		
More than three times / Twice	0.389***		
	Sample size: 251 Significance codes: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05		

Source ULF Evaluation 2016 learner survey

The analysis above focuses on the extent to which the positive outcomes reported (from multiple episodes of union learning and qualification progression) remain significant in the long run. Asking participants about the outcomes of union learning at multiple occasions helps to control for a lagged effect of learning, which is particularly important in relation to soft outcomes. The findings suggest unequivocally that gaining higher qualifications was associated strongly with higher levels of soft outcomes of learning. Likewise, having multiple episodes of learning significantly increases learners' chances for building self-confidence, developing coaching and mentoring skills and planning and budgeting skills. **The effect of learning frequency takes hold only after the third episode of learning.** It implies that the likelihood of union learning delivering intangible benefits to learners increases substantially when they take part in multiple learning opportunities, and notably, three episodes or more greatly increases this effect.

4 Employers' perspectives of union-led learning

This section reports the findings of a workplace level survey of employers' perspectives of union-led learning. The survey was conducted between November 2015 and March 2016. In total the survey generated 385 responses.

4.1 Survey method

The survey was based on a modified questionnaire that was employed in a similar survey conducted during late 2009/ early 2010 that generated 415 useable responses. A further survey was conducted in early 2012/13, but this is not used here for comparative purposes as it was a 'snap shot' survey conducted during a short timeframe and generated far fewer responses at 170. The latest survey instrument was divided into five sections: company background; employment relations and union background; learning and staff development; unions and learning in the workplace; the impact of union learning.

The sample for the 2015/16 survey was carefully derived from multiple sources. The first stage was to identify appropriate employers that had been involved in some way in union learning and that could be verified via a number of sources as genuine. Second, once an employer had been identified some effort was often needed to identify the appropriate management contact at the relevant workplace. The first source of employers was based on a review of all editions of the Learner Rep magazine (published on the unionlearn website) from April 2012 (the current ULF evaluation period), which generated 200 cases. A further 150 cases were provided directly by unions involved in relevant ULF projects and an additional 60 employers were generated from the learners' survey. Finally, all the cases collected were compared against the respondents of the 2009/10 and 2012/13 surveys and respondents not already noted were added to the sample, which generated a further 490 respondents. This gave us a sample of 900 employers.

The next step was to identify the appropriate management contact for interview. Where contacts interviewed for the 2009/10 and 2012/13 surveys no longer worked for the employer, we sought the appropriate contact via company websites, LinkedIn and management chains within companies. Of the original 900 contacts some 40 were not appropriate for survey purposes, either because the company has ceased trading, or had a 'no survey' policy, were not the appropriate site for survey or it was just too premature to evaluate union learning activity. This meant the final sample for survey purposes was 860. The survey was conducted via telephone interview, with researchers completing the instrument directly into Survey Monkey. Each interview lasted on average 15 minutes and considerable effort was taken to ensure that the number of missing responses was low. In total the number of responses was 385, giving a response rate of 45 per cent.

4.2 Company background

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed between the private and public sectors, with similar proportions to the first employer survey (figures given in brackets). In total, 43 (47) per cent of respondents were from the private sector with 53 (51) per

cent from the public sector. The remaining respondents were from the voluntary and social sectors. Table 4.1 shows the distribution by sector of the employing organisations. This shows data for the ULF employers' survey and also shows a comparison with data from the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (2011) across the distribution of unionised workplaces by sector. Table 4.1 shows that a third of respondents (33%) in the ULF employer survey were in public administration and a further 16 per cent in health related sectors. Transportation and storage and manufacturing accounted for a further 14 per cent each. These four sectors accounted for 80 per cent of ULF workplaces surveyed. The table illustrates that this profile is broadly similar to the distribution reported across the UK in WERS 2011. Although there are some notable differences in that the ULF survey had a higher proportion of workplaces in public administration and transportation and storage and a lower proportion in the professional and financial services sectors and in education. This might be expected as ULF activity tends to target those employees in workplaces with lower levels of qualification and access to learning opportunity.

Table 4.1 Distribution of Workplaces by Standard Industrial Classification (2007)				
	WERS 2011	WERS 2011	ULF 15-16	ULF 15-16
	n	%	n	%
O: Public administration and defence	228	15.2%	127	33.2%
Q: Human health and social work activities	312	20.8%	62	16.1%
H: Transportation and storage	117	7.8%	54	14.0%
C: Manufacturing	129	8.6%	53	13.8%
R: Arts, entertainment and recreation	62	4.1%	19	4.9%
G: Wholesale and retail	75	5.0%	17	4.4%
L: Real estate activities	33	2.2%	15	3.9%
P: Education	300	20.0%	13	3.4%
E: Water supply, sewerage and waste management	32	2.1%	6	1.6%
K: Financial and insurance activities	17	1.1%	6	1.6%
F: Construction	30	2.0%	5	1.3%
J: Information and communication	13	0.9%	5	1.3%
I: Accommodation and food service	19	1.3%	2	0.5%
D: Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	46	3.1%	0	0.0%
M: Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	26	1.7%	0	0.0%
N: Administrative and Support Service Activities	30	2.0%	0	0.0%
S: Other service activities	28	1.9%	0	0.0%
Total	1,497	100.0%	384	100.0%

Base: ULF 384, WERS 2011 336

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey and WERS 2011 ONS (unweighted)

The organisations surveyed employed a significant number of employees. The total number of employees working in the workplaces that were surveyed was 1.08 million employees. The total number of employees working in the organisations surveyed (i.e. the total workforce when workplaces were part of larger organisations) was 4.07 million.

Seven years after the depths of the economic recession it is evident that employers were still undertaking considerable programmes of workforce restructuring. As Table 4.2 shows, a greater percentage of respondents reported that they had cut back employment in the previous 12 months than had increased the number of employees. Specifically, just over a third (38%) reported that employment had been cut back in the previous twelve months, while a little under a quarter (22%) indicated that they had been recruiting. There was a statistically significant difference between the public and private sectors. Nearly six in ten (57%) public sector respondents reported that employment had decreased; just 15 per cent stated that it had increased. In contrast, just 15 per cent of private sector respondents reported that employment had decreased and nearly three in ten (29%) reported that it had increased.

The 2010 survey did not ask respondents about the previous 12 months but how their organisation had fared as a result of the economic crisis. At that time, some 42 per cent reported that employment had decreased and just seven per cent reported that it was increasing. While it is clear that many employers were still cutting back staff, there was some indication that a greater percentage were looking to take on staff some five years' later. There has also been a notable public-private sector shift. In 2010 it was private sector organisations that were more likely to be shedding staff, whereas in 2015 it was more likely in the public sector. Give these findings, it is perhaps no surprise that private sector employers (70%) were more likely to report they were satisfied with levels of employee job security compared to those in the public sector (36%).

Table 4.2: Change in employment over last 12 months (% of employers)			
	Increased	same	Decreased
Change in employee numbers over last 12 months	22	40	38

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

A number of wider indicators are presented in Table 4.3. Despite the evidence on employment, respondents generally appeared sanguine about their current operating environment. Around a third (34%) of respondents reported that, in their view, organisation performance had increased in the past 12 months, compared to just 11 per cent that noted that performance had decreased.

Table 4.3: Change in key organisational indicators in last 12 months (% of employers)			
	Increased	same	decreased
Organisational performance	34	56	11
Levels of investment in training	30	53	17
Joint working with unions	24	70	5

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

The majority of respondents reported that levels of investment in training (53%) and joint working with unions (70%) had remained the same in the previous 12 months: more respondents were likely to report increases than decreases.

Three in ten reported that levels of investment in training had increased, while just under a fifth (17%) reported that levels of training had decreased. This represented to some extent a reversal of the findings from the 2010 survey, where three in ten reported that investment levels in training had declined and just over one in ten (13%) that training investment had increased during the economic downturn. Again, there was a notable difference between the public and private sectors, with some evidence of a large decline in public sector training investment. More than a quarter (26%) of public sector respondents reported that levels of investment in training had declined, compared to just five per cent of private sector workplaces. Four in ten private sector respondents, in contrast, reported increasing levels of training investment, compared to a little under a quarter (23%) of respondents in the public sector.

The findings for joint working with unions had remained broadly unchanged during the past five years. In 2010, nearly three in ten respondents (29%) reported that joint working with unions had increased and just two per cent that it had decreased, compared to just under a quarter (24%) that reported increased joint working in 2015. Again, just five per cent reported that joint working had decreased in the previous year in the 2015 survey. The majority of respondents, nearly seven in ten (68%) reported that joint working had remained the same.

Union representation was varied across the employers participating in the survey, although in general there was a tendency towards well represented workplaces. The most common response, accounting for 39 per cent of respondents, was that around 50-74 cases of the workforce were members of a trade union, with density levels of between 25-49 per cent in a further 35 per cent of cases. Far fewer could be considered to be high union density (12%: >75%) or low union density (14%: <24%) workplaces.

4.3 Management-union arrangements

The survey initially explored management-union relations in terms of the degree of joint decision-making around a variety of workplace issues. Table 4.4 thus explores the extent of union involvement, utilising a standard panel of questions derived from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) instrument. Taken as a whole, the findings show a trend decline in levels of negotiation across nearly all workplace issues, pensions being the solitary exception, and a trend increase in consultation across all variables. The trend decline has been reported in other national levels surveys, such as WERS (2011). The findings across the extent to which unions were informed or not involved were more variable, with a large degree of consistency and in the case of recruitment and appraisal a slight increase in information sharing and a slight decline in the extent of non-involvement.

Table 4.4: Involvement in workplace issues (% of employers; 2010 employer survey in brackets)

	Negotiate	Consult	Inform	Not involve	No 2015
Pay	54 (69)	37 (22)	4 (5)	5 (4)	384
Hours of work	48 (60)	40 (30)	5 (5)	7 (4)	384
Training of employees	14 (27)	48 (41)	26 (19)	12 (13)	384
Pension entitlements	43 (43)	40 (28)	9 (17)	9 (12)	383
Recruitment and selection of employees	9 (13)	35 (30)	31 (26)	25 (31)	384
Grievance/ disciplinary procedures	26 (43)	59 (48)	10 (6)	4 (3)	384
Performance appraisal	12 (15)	38 (36)	27 (20)	23 (30)	384
Equal opportunities/ diversity	20 (28)	50 (55)	21 (10)	9 (6)	384
Health and Safety	22 (35)	54 (57)	17 (5)	7 (3)	384

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

For the purposes of this analysis, two issues are of particular salience. The extent to which pay and training are the subject of negotiation have been consistently associated in previous research with beneficial outcomes of union-led learning. With this in mind, the findings are potentially worrying. The percentage of employers that negotiated over pay declined from around seven out of every ten (69%) to just over half (54%). Levels of consultation, in contrast, increased from just over a fifth (22%) to 37 per cent. Likewise, reported levels of negotiation over training appear to have declined by almost half. In 2010, just over quarter (27%) of respondents reported negotiating over training, whereas by 2015 just 14 per cent reported that they negotiated over training. Again, levels of consultation had increased, up from 41 per cent in 2010 to 48 per cent in 2015. There was also a notable increase in basic information sharing, up from 19 per cent in 2010 to 17 per cent in 2015. Negotiation levels were typically higher across variables for the public sector. Specifically with regard to training, negotiation was reported by 18 per cent and consultation by 52 per cent of respondents in the public sector, compared to 10 per cent and 42 per cent of private sector respondents respectively. Private sector workplaces were almost twice as likely (16%) to have no involvement over training decisions than public sector workplaces (9%).

This picture of declining levels of negotiation should not necessarily be taken as indicative of deteriorating employment relations. When asked to describe the perceived relationship between management and unions at their workplace just over two-thirds (68%) of respondents reported that the relationship was either good or very good. Very few thought that it was bad (just over 5%), while approximately a quarter (27%) were neutral. There was not a directly comparable question asked in 2010, although at that time 73 per cent reported they were in favour of trade unions and a quarter were neutral.

Table 4.5: Union Learning Representatives at the workplace

	2015	2010
Extent of ULRs at workplace: per cent of employers reporting that ULRs are present	76%	87%
Number of ULRs in total (average per workplace)	1, 520 (6)	3, 920 (11)

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

With regard to union learning, Table 4.5 reports levels of Union Learning Representatives at survey workplaces in 2015 and 2010. There was a slight decline in the number of respondents reporting that they had recognised ULRs at their workplace, down from 87 per cent in 2010 to around three quarters (76%) in 2015. While the proportion of ULRs was slightly higher in the public (79%) than private sector (73%) this was not statistically significant. There was also some evidence that in those workplaces with ULRs the extent of organisation had declined, as overall numbers appeared to be lower, as was the comparative average number of ULRs, down from 11 in 2010 to 6 in 2015. This was clearly an effect of what was happening in larger organisations and further analysis is needed to examine this in terms of sectoral effect and in terms of the panel of workplaces that completed responses in 2015 and 2010.

4.4 Training practices at work

In this section we explore general levels of commitment towards training by the employers in our survey. Table 4.6 shows the types of training and staff development policy and practice that employers report as present in their organisations. Table 4.5 compares the responses from the 2015 employer survey responses to the same question of employers in 2010.

Table 4.6: Training and staff development policies (% of employers)			
	2015	Difference	2010
Organisation wide training plan	90	+2	88
A budget for training expenditure	95	+8	87
Staff appraisal scheme	98	+8	90
Formal apprenticeship programme	71	+9	62
Time off for staff to attend education/ training	98	+5	93
Company learning centre	61	-8	69
Investors in People	44	-13	57

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

In general, there appeared to be a slight increase in the prevalence of training and staff development policies in 2015 compared to 2010. The two notable exceptions were whether the organisation was recognised for Investors in People (IiP) or whether there was a company learning centre at the workplace. In 2010 just under six in ten respondents (57%) reported that they were recognised by IiP, which had declined to less than half (44%) by 2015. The decline in the prevalence of workplace learning centres was less stark, but still dropped by eight per cent between 2010 and 2015 (from 69% to 61%). There were no significant differences in these overall responses between employers in the public and private sectors.

The findings were more positive in terms of apprenticeship training and time off for staff to undertake education and training. The number of respondents reporting that they had a formal apprenticeship programme increased from 62 per cent in 2010 to 71 per cent in 2015. Against the backdrop of a policy narrative that emphasises the need to raise levels of apprenticeship training, this seems to be a positive development. Likewise, by 2015 nearly all (98%) respondents reported that they allowed their staff time off to attend education and training provision. The extent to which the company pays for this time is considered later in the section.

More generally, there appeared to be high levels of formal supports structures for training and staff development and this seemed to have strengthened between 2010 and 2015. Nearly all workplaces appeared to have training plans (90%), budgets (95%) and staff appraisal (98%) schemes. There was no significant difference between the public and private sectors. These positive developments appeared to have translated into increased levels of training participation. Respondents were asked what proportion of employees in their workplace had been given time off from their normal duties to undertake employer-provided training during the previous 12 months. The percentage that reported that **all** employees had been given time off increased from just over a fifth (22%) in 2010 to 29 per cent in 2015. Similarly, the percentage reporting that most staff (more than 60%) had been given time off increased from 57 per cent in 2010 to 67 per cent in 2015.

Recent research has suggested that the volume of training in Britain has decreased considerably in the past decade (see for example Green et al, 2015). Our survey findings offer support for this. While training volumes at higher levels (more than 5 and 10 days) remained stable between 2010 and 2015, there was a notable decline in the extent to which employees on average received two to five days training per year (a range that is typically the norm), from just under half (48%) in 2010 to just three in ten by 2015. This decline appears to have been negatively compensated by lower volumes of training, with the numbers of employees receiving between one to two days and less than one day having increased by eight per cent and ten per cent respectively between 2010 and 2015.

There were notable differences between the public and private sectors in 2015. Private sector workplaces were both more likely to report higher levels of training and the lowest levels of training. Thus, 13 per cent of private sector workplaces reported an average of more than 10 days' training per year for its staff compared to just six per cent in the private sector. At the same time, just over a fifth (22%) of private sector employers reported that on average training lasted less than one day compared to just six per cent in the public sector. The public sector was more likely to report on average 5-10 days training per year, reported by 31 per cent compared to 14 per cent in the private sector.

Table 4.7: Number of training days in past 12 months (% of employers)			
	2015	Difference (%)	2010
10 days or more	9	+1	8
5 to less than 10 days	24	0	24
2 to less than 5 days	30	-18	48
1 to less than 2 days	24	+8	16
Less than one day	13	+10	3
No time at all	0	-2	2

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

Given the recent policy emphasis on apprenticeships the survey sought to explore respondents' views on the forthcoming apprenticeship levy and the extent to which apprenticeship policies at the workplace were covered by collective agreements.

The findings are reported in Tables 4.8 and 4.9. As Table 4.8 indicates, the majority of respondents (60%) indicated that the introduction of the apprenticeship levy would make no difference to their levels of investment in training. Significantly, just over a fifth (22%) reported that training investment levels would actually increase – though twice as many private sector than public sector respondents suggested this would be the case - with just under one in ten (9%) reporting that investment would decrease. A similar proportion were not aware of the levy. Superficially at least these findings suggest that there is little empirical basis to the criticism of the apprenticeship levy voiced by employer bodies such as the Chamber of British Industry (CBI).

Where apprenticeship programmes currently exist, only a slight majority were covered by some form of agreement, with 42 per cent not being covered by any agreement at all. Where agreements do exist they are typically specific apprenticeship agreements (36%), followed by learning agreements (26%) and collective agreements (18%) that contain provisional clauses on apprenticeship.

Table 4.8: Extent to which apprenticeship levy will increase investment in training (% of employers)

	%	Private (%)	Public (%)
Increase	22	31	15
Stay the same	60	58	62
Decrease	9	4	13
Not aware of apprenticeship levy	9	7	10

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey, n=384

Table 4.9: Agreements covering apprenticeships (% of employers)

	%
Collective agreement	18
Apprenticeship agreements	36
Learning Agreement	26
No agreement	42

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey, n=382

4.5 Union learning activity

Of the employers surveyed four out ten were currently involved in a Union Learning Fund project. Just over half (53%) had previously been involved in a ULF project and one in five had been involved in multiple ULF projects. A small minority, one fifth, had never been involved with unions on any ULF projects. It is important to recognise, however, that this does not always mean that employees at those workplaces would never have received any benefit from the ULF. There are instances where ULF activity engages workplace employees, but that managers are not aware of such activity.

Table 4.10: Organisational involvement with unions on learning (% of employers)

	2015	Private	Public	2010
Raising awareness of the benefits of learning/training	82	78	86	N/A
Addressing basic skills gaps	73	73	73	N/A
Identifying individuals' training needs	66	67	66	N/A
Increasing participation of non-traditional learners in training	66	72	62	N/A
Funding employees to take work-related courses	57	53	58	78
Employee time off to discuss learning with ULRs	55	54	57	68
Funding employees to take part in non-work related courses	50	57*	45*	46
Development of a joint union-management learning centre	36	45*	29*	53
Developing an apprenticeship programme	32	28	35	44
Traineeships or work experience for young people	32	22**	39**	N/A

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

*Chi-square statistical significance at 0.05 or less; **0.01 or less

Table 4.10 examines in more detail the specific areas of activity that employers were looking to engage with unions on around learning and the union learning agenda. The findings are reported in ranked order of prevalence; with comparison made to the 2010 survey where relevant (the questions covered slightly different issues). The most common areas where employers were getting involved with unions around learning issues were in relation to raising awareness of the benefits of learning/ training (82%) and policies around addressing basic skills gaps (73%). Following on from this, two-thirds (66%) of employers had engaged with unions around the identification of individuals' training needs and increasing participation of non-traditional learners in training. These activities could all be considered, to some extent, to be aspirational policy formulation. Involvement in more practical activities around learning and its governance were less frequently reported.

Activities focused specifically on learning activity were reported by just over half the sample. Thus, 57 per cent of respondents had helped fund employees to take work-related courses and 55 per cent had allowed employees time off to discuss learning with their ULRs. It is notable that this level of activity had declined significantly since 2010. In contrast there was a small increase in funding for employees to take part in non-work related courses, up to half from 46 per cent in 2010. There was also a marked decline in initiatives designed to set up joint union-management learning centres. Just over a third (36%) of respondents reported such activity in 2015, compared to just over half (53%) in 2010.

While the survey found that employee activity around apprenticeships in general had increased, this was not the case in terms of working with unions around the development of apprenticeship programmes. Employer activity on apprenticeships seemed to have declined between 2010 and 2015. In 2010 44 per cent of employers responded that they had been involved with unions on the development of apprenticeships, but such activity was reported by just under a third (32%) in 2015. A similar proportion had also reported that they had recently been involved with unions around traineeships or work placement initiatives for young people.

Overall, the majority of employers reported that they valued the union learning agenda, both with regard to the ULF and the role played by workplace ULRs. More than half of respondents (55%) agreed or strongly agreed that managers at their workplace saw value in the ULF, just eight per cent disagreed. Private sector employers were slightly more likely to report they valued the ULF than their counterparts in the public sector. Likewise, more than six in ten (62%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that managers at their workplace valued ULRs, just 7 per cent disagreed.

Given this, it is pertinent to explore what types of support are available for union learning at the workplace. Table 4.11 details the types of financial supports that organisations provided to further support union learning activities. While the amount of management time given to support union learning activities remained roughly the same between 2010 (64%) and 2015 (61%), there was a clear decline in the extent to which organisations provided either in-kind or a cash contribution to support union learning activities. The number of respondents reporting that their organisation provided a cash contribution towards union learning activities declined by more than half between 2010 and 2015, from 49 per cent to just under a quarter (23%) respectively. It is worth noting, however, that when asked exactly how much this cash contribution was relatively few managers could actually specify. The most common type of support remained an in-kind contribution, but this had also declined from 90 per cent in 2010 to just over three quarters (78%) of workplaces in 2015.

Table 4.11: Organisational support for union learning activities (% of employers)		
	2015	2010
Cash contribution	23	49
Management time	61	64
Other in-kind contribution	78	90

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

Table 4.12 considers in more detail just what types of in-kind contribution were offered. Again, there was a decline in the level of all types of in-kind contribution between 2010 and 2015. The top three types of in-kind contribution in 2015 remained ULR time (80%), employee time (71%) and equipment (68%). While eight in ten respondents reported that support was provided for ULR time, it is notable that this type of in-kind contribution had declined by 12 per cent from 2010. While the degree of support remained high, it is worth noting that reasonable time to conduct their duties is a statutory right of ULRs. Likewise, time support for employees remained high, but even though just over seven in ten (71%) respondents identified this type of in-kind contribution in 2015, this was a decline of 18 per cent from 2010. When asked directly whether employees undertook union learning activity in paid work time, just over a fifth (21%) of respondents reported this was the case. More common was a mix of employees' own time and paid work time, which was reported by 56 per cent of respondents. In nearly a quarter of cases (23%) employees were only able to undertake union learning activity in their own time.

Similar levels of decline were apparent with regard to office space and equipment, which had fallen by 24 per cent to 60 per cent and by 13 per cent to 68 per cent respectively. Just over half (54%) of respondents reported in-kind support for a learning centre, which represented a small decline of seven per cent from 2010.

Table 4.12: Type of in-kind contribution (% of employers)			
	2015	Difference	2010
ULR time	80	-12	92
Employee time	71	-18	89
Equipment	68	-13	81
Office space	60	-24	84
Learning centre	54	-7	61
Management time	51	-18	69

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

The extent to which management offers support for union learning activities is often codified and the subject for discussion through workplace governance structures such as learning agreements and learning committees. The prevalence of such structures is detailed in Table 4.13. Again, there was some evidence of decline in the overall codification and degree of joint dialogue around union learning activities. Just under half (48%) of all respondents reported that there was a learning agreement in their organisation. This figure was little changed from 2010, although there was a small decline of five per cent. There was a more significant decline in the extent of learning committees. Just four in ten respondents reported that they had established a learning committee, down from around half (51%) in 2010. Levels appeared to be slightly higher in the private than public sectors, but this was only significant in terms of learning agreements.

Table 4.13: Governance supports for union learning activities (% of employers)					
	2015	Private	Public	2010	Difference
Learning committee	40	43	37	51	-11
Learning agreement	48	53*	45*	53	-5

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

The identification of a learning agreement tells us little, of course, about how such an agreement may operate in practice. They may play a significant role in codifying and shaping union learning activities at the workplace level or they may not. To explore this issue we asked respondents what types of issues were covered by the learning agreement in their organisation. The findings are detailed in Table 4.14, with comparisons between 2010 and 2015 where relevant. It is clear that learning agreements typically detailed the extent of ULR facility time and time off for staff to attend work-related training. Nine of out of ten agreements had a provision for ULR facility time and 86 per cent for staff time off for work-related training. These findings were very similar to the picture in 2010. While we did not ask a similar question on work and non-work-related training, there was a generic question on 'learning activities' and this was also 86 per cent in 2010.

The most notable changes in the provisions of learning agreements between 2010 and 2015 related to equality of access to learning opportunities and terms of reference for joint learning committees. Provisions around equality of access to learning opportunities were detailed in more than nine out of every ten (93%) learning agreements in 2010, but by 2015 this was the case for just over six out of every ten (63%) agreements. A similar trend decline was evident with regard to terms of reference for joint learning committees, which was codified by half in 2015 and some 84 per cent in 2010.

Of some interest, learning agreements in 2015 were more likely to have a provision on the joint financing of learning. Nearly half of respondents (48%) reported such a provision in 2015, an increase of seven per cent from 2010.

Table 4.14: Issues covered by learning agreement (% of employers)

	2015	Difference	2010
Terms of reference for joint learning committee	50	-34	84
ULR facility time	90	-5	95
Staff time off for work-related training	86	-	N/A
Staff time off for non-work-related training	54	-	N/A
Equality of access to learning opportunities	63	-30	93
Levels of company financing of learning and training	42	-	N/A
Joint financing of learning	48	+7	41

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

4.6 Outcomes and added value of union learning activity

This section examines the potential outcomes of union learning, from a management perspective. The section starts by considering the extent to which managers regarded union learning as contributing directly to increased demand and uptake for learning from employees. Table 4.15 considers the extent to which union learning initiatives acted to raise demand for learning amongst different categories of workers. It is clear that, as far as managers were concerned, the greatest potential of union learning was to raise demand for learning amongst workers with lower levels of skills.

The difference in proportion of response was very little changed between 2010 and 2015. Six out of every ten respondents reported that union learning helps to raise demand for learning for those with little history of training/ learning, while around two-thirds (65%) suggested that demand was increased amongst those with low literacy and numeracy skills. When asked directly whether union learning had inspired reluctant learners (who typically are seen to have lower skills levels) to take part more generally in training, just over two-thirds (68%) of managers agreed. In contrast, just under a quarter (24%) reported that union learning contributed to raising demand for those with high skills. This was much more likely to have happened in the public sector (30%) compared to the private sector (16%).

Overall, demand for learning across all three indicators was positively associated with the extent to which respondents valued the ULF and ULRs and had a learning agreement in place. A learning committee was positively associated with all criteria expect for those with high skills.

Table 4.15: Raising demand for learning (% of employers)			
	2015	Difference	2010
Those with little history of training/ learning	60	-8	68
Those with low literacy/ numeracy skills	65	-6	71
Those with high skills	24	-4	28

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

Table 4.16: Key outcomes of union learning initiatives (% of employers, 2010 survey results in brackets)					
	Significantly increased	Increased (2010)	Static	Decreased	Significantly decreased
Take-up of job-related training	5	37 (41)	57	1	0
Take-up of non-job-related training	7	39 (37)	51	2	1
Number of employees attaining qualifications	6	47 (54)	45	1	0
Equality of access	9	53 (56)	38	1	0
Employer expenditure	1	30 (22)	67	3	0
Organisational performance	2	30 (32)	68	0	0
Health and safety improvements	5	27 (39)	68	0	0
Improvements in staff turnover	2	14 (9)	81	4	0
Employee commitment	5	42 (39)	54	0	0
Level of trust between management and unions	4	40 (42)	55	1	0
Extent of bargaining with unions over training/ learning	4	38 (41)	56	2	0
Take-up of apprenticeships	3	17 (15)	79	1	0

Source: 2016 and 2010 ULF evaluation employer surveys

Table 4.16 expands the focus to consider a wide variety of potential outcomes that union learning may have contributed to. These factors can be considered to be the potential benefits of union learning at the organisational level. Clearly, managers are well placed to evaluate such benefits and the potential contribution that union learning could make. The measurement scale was slightly different to the scale utilised in the 2010 survey, which only asked whether outcomes had 'increased', but the reported findings are included in the table in brackets.

In aggregate a large minority of respondents reported positive outcomes across all variables. However, only two variables elicited positive responses from the majority of survey participants: increased levels of qualifications and increased equality of access to training/ learning. Specifically, just over half of respondents indicated

that union learning had led to an increased (47%) or significantly increased (6%) number of employees attaining qualifications. The findings of the 2010 survey were almost identical. Further, just over six in ten (62%) respondents reported that equality of access to training and learning had either increased (53%) or significantly increased (9%). This was a six per cent increase on the levels reported in the 2010 survey.

The next group of outcomes cover training levels, employees' attitudes and the employment relations climate. These indicators were all seen to have increased by more than four out of every ten respondents. In total, 43 per cent of respondents reported that union learning had contributed to an increased (37%) or significantly increased (5%) take-up of job-related training, with similar proportions reporting either an increase (39%) or significant increase (7%) in the take-up of non-job-related training. The latter had increased notably (up by 9%) from 2010. The extent to which union learning had led to increased levels of employee commitment also appeared to have risen between 2010 and 2015 (up by 8%), with 42 per cent of respondents reporting that employee commitment had increased and five per cent reporting it had significantly increased. Managers also seemed favourably disposed to the potential benefits of union learning initiatives for employment relations, with 44 per cent reporting that levels of trust between management and union had increased (40%) or significantly increased (4%). A similar proportion reported that the extent of bargaining over training and learning had increased (38%) or significantly increased (4%). Curiously, this was pretty much identical to the findings reported by the 2010 cohort, even though overall, as noted earlier, reported levels of negotiation over training declined between 2010 and 2015.

Harder indicators of organisational performance were less likely to have been reported as increased by respondents. Nonetheless, around one third of respondents reported that organisational performance had either increased (30%) or increased significantly (2%) as a result of union learning initiatives. This proportion was identical to the levels reported in 2010. Union learning was reported to have led to improvement in health and safety by 32 per cent of respondents and staff turnover by 14 per cent of respondents. A notable finding related to employer expenditure on training and development. This is considered an area of considerable management prerogative that it not typically open to joint decision making. Yet, nearly one third of respondents (31%) reported that expenditure on training and development had increased as a consequence of union learning. This was significantly higher than levels reported in 2010, when a little over a fifth (22%) responded positively. Finally, just one fifth of respondents reported that union learning initiatives had resulted in either a significant increase (3%) or an increase (17%) in the take-up of apprenticeships. This was a five per cent increase on the 2010 findings.

There was an association between most of the outcome variables and the extent to which employers valued union learning (either the ULF or ULRs) and whether they had a learning committee and a learning agreement. The most notable exception to this was with regard to apprenticeships, and also staff turnover and health and safety. This needs to be interrogated further via multi-variate analysis.

These findings suggest that even though reported levels of employer involvement and support for union learning appeared to have declined slightly in recent years there are still perceived benefits attached to the union learning agenda. This raises questions of the broader value that employers may attach to engagement with union learning. This is explored in Table 4.17, which reviews the extent to which employers attributed added value to union learning. In terms of the direct benefits for employees, a relatively small proportion of respondents attributed union learning to increased promotion and reward opportunities. Thus, around one in ten managers (11%) reported that employees were more likely to have been awarded a pay rise as a result of union learning, while just over a fifth (21%) suggested that employees would be more likely to be promoted as a result of completing union learning. A high majority of employees (more than seven in ten) disagreed with such scenarios. Whether this is actually the case, or not, can be examined more systematically with reference to the union learner survey data.

Table 4.17: Added value of union learning (% of employers, 2010 survey results in brackets)

	Significantly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Significantly disagree
Management is very supportive of the union role in training	27	51 (80)	18	3	1
Learning activities would NOT have taken place without external union funding	11	36 (28)	15	28 (43)	11
Would consider similar learning and training in the absence of ULF funding	12	38	16	27	7
Employees are more likely to be promoted having completed union learning	2	19	40	30	9
Employees are more likely to be awarded a pay rise as a result of union learning	0	11	42	37	0

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

A large majority of employers seemed to be supportive of the union learning agenda. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents either agreed (51%) or strongly agreed (27%) that management at their workplace were very supportive of the union role in training. (Private sector employers were more likely to report that they strongly agreed with this sentiment.) This was almost an identical finding to the degree of support reported in the 2010 survey (which was 80%).

One concern with any form of public scheme for investment is the extent to which it may be subject to deadweight. This is particularly salient for investments in training. To what extent does the ULF largely fund activity that employers would have otherwise funded themselves? The survey findings suggest that union learning was perceived to add value in this regard. Notably, just under half of respondents (47%) agreed (36%) or significantly agreed (11%) that learning activities would not have taken place without external union funding, while 39 per cent disagreed. This represented a large increase on the findings from the 2010 survey, when a little over a quarter (28%) reported that union learning facilitated new training provision. This finding was further interrogated by asking whether

employers would consider funding such learning in the absence of ULF funding. Half agreed that they would consider such activity, while just over a third (34%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. **From these findings we can conclude that the added value of union learning to firms' learning practices was somewhere between 34 per cent and 47 per cent.**

Again, all the findings on the potential value added of union learning were positively associated, via chi-square testing, with a favourable disposition to union learning in general – valuing ULRs and the ULF – and the establishment of mechanisms to support union learning, through learning committees and learning agreements. Possible associations are explored in the next section, via exploratory multi-variate analysis.

At a more illustrative level, respondents were asked what proportion of employees would not have taken part in learning/ training activity without the support available from the union. The findings are reported in Table 4.18. For a small majority of respondents, less than half the workforce explicitly benefitted as a result of union support for learning. Thus, half of respondents indicated that less than quarter of their employees would not have benefited from learning without union support. **Nonetheless, just under a quarter of respondents (23%) reported that the majority of their employees (76-100%) would not have taken part in learning/ training without the support of their union.**

Table 4.18: Proportion of employees that would NOT have learnt without union support (% of employers)	
0-25%	50
26-50%	9
51-75%	19
76-100%	23

Source: 2016 ULF evaluation employer survey

Taken together, these findings suggest that union learning has the potential to add some considerable value to workplace training activities, encouraging not just employer openness to training investment but also employee uptake of learning. Given this, it was perhaps no surprise that just over three quarters (77%) of respondents reported that, in their view, their organisation received a return on their investment in union learning activity. Despite this, and in common with most training investment in the UK, only a very small proportion of managers (7%) indicated that they had undertaken a formal cost-benefit of union learning.

4.7 Multivariate analysis of impact of union learning on employer outcomes

The employer dataset was interrogated further with multivariate methods. The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the variables covered in Table 4.16 that detailed the key outcomes of union learning initiatives were scrutinised via data reduction techniques, which in this case was the principal components (PCA) method. The aim here is to reduce the 12 variables in this panel to a fewer number of related variables for further analysis.

This procedure threw out three blocks of variables: indicators of training (which included, number of qualifications, equality of access and employer expenditure on training); organisational performance (which included, performance and health and safety); employment relations climate (which included staff turnover, employee commitment, levels of trust, extent of bargaining). Three variables were found to not fit any of these three factors: take-up of job-related training; take-up of non-job-related training; take-up of an apprenticeship.

Second, the three factors that emerged from the PCA procedure were inserted into regression models, proceeded on a step-wise basis. Each factor represented a dependent model. To this, we also add an analysis of reported training incidence (see Table 4.7: the number of training days in the past 12 months). Each dependent variable was explored via four regression models. Model one inserted into the analysis: learning committee; learning agreement; learning centre. Model two inserted into the analysis: extent of involvement on pay and conditions (with no involvement the omitted variable); extent of involvement on training (with no involvement the omitted variable). Model three inserted into the analysis: employer investment in training; whether the ULF is valued; job security. Model four inserted a number of controls: SIC codes; workplace size; organisational size; union density.

The analysis presented in Table 4.19 shows statistically significant (at minimum 0.05) factors only against each model. It is clear that as the models are developed the factors that have statistical salience often change. Across all the models key organisational supports, such as learning committee, learning agreements and learning centre, are seen to play a role in shaping whether employers perceive union learning as having an impact. But as the models develop these factors in some cases are rendered less significant compared to the institutional basis of employee involvement, the extent to which employers invest in training more generally and the extent to which employers value the ULF.

Table 4.19: Multivariate analysis of impact of union learning			
Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Training incidence			
Learning agreement		Investment in training	Learning agreement
			Investment in training
Impact on training			
Learning committee	Learning committee	Learning centre	Learning centre
Learning centre	Learning centre	Value ULF	Value ULF
Impact on organisational performance			
Learning centre	Learning centre	Negotiation over training	Investment in training
	Negotiation over training	Investment in training	
Impact on employment relations			
Learning committee	Learning committee	Learning centre	Value ULF
Learning agreement	Learning centre	Value ULF	
Learning centre	Negotiation and consultation over training		

4.8 Summary

In summary, the full model (model 4 with controls) found the following for each dependent variable. For *model one*, all factors considered, a learning agreement and a higher level of employer investment in training were more likely to be associated with higher levels of training incidence. For *model two*, all factors considered, the key factors impacting the degree of impact on training were the existence of a learning centre and the extent to which employers value the ULF. For *model three*, all factors considered, the union learning was most likely to have an impact on organisational performance where employers invest in training to higher levels. For *model four*, all factors considered, the factor most likely to be associated with a positive impact of the ULF on employment relations was the extent to which employers value the ULF.

These findings need, however, to be heavily caveated. There is a strong possibility that the final models are 'over-fitted', with too many variables detracting. More analysis is needed to be assured of the most parsimonious models for each factor under investigation. For now, all we can say with confidence is that union learning is most likely to have an impact on a range of organisational outcomes where there are established support structures for union learning (such as committees, agreements and centres), high levels of employee involvement on pay and training decisions, high levels of employer investment in training more generally and where employers value the ULF.

5 Multilevel analysis of union learning outcomes

5.1 Introduction

Thus far the present report conveys a straightforward message that union learning was beneficial for all parties involved: learners, employers and trade unions. To further substantiate this claim a multilevel sample of learners nested on their respective workplaces was analysed. A linked employer-learner dataset was constructed, with 865 learners derived from the main learner survey nested on 75 workplaces obtained from the employer survey. Consistent with the strictures of a multilevel methodological framework we ensured that at least 3 learners were associated with each workplace. The procedure for constructing a multilevel sample was as follows. Firstly, unique workplaces specified by learners in the main learner survey were taken as a key criterion for nesting. Secondly, based on the workplace identifier, the learner survey was sifted so as to preserve the learners only within the workplaces that could be linked to the employer survey. In doing so a final sample of 865 learners nested on 75 workplaces was obtained and merged with the employer survey. The nested sample was relatively well balanced, compared to the main learner and employer surveys, with 87 per cent of learners being native English speakers and the majority of respondents (83%) being in full time employment. Service and operative occupational categories accounted for 56 per cent of the nested sample. In terms of employers, 56 per cent of workplaces in the nested sample were private sector firms as opposed to 43 per cent of public sector organisations and just 0.7 per cent of third sector organisations. Gender composition of surveyed workplaces was slightly skewed towards males who on average accounted for 55 per cent of the workforce. The median firm size was 2,000 employees, with a range from 80 employees through to 37,000. In all, the sample was deemed satisfactory for further statistical interrogation.

The advantages of multilevel modelling are twofold. First and foremost, it takes account of the fact that some learners come from the same workplace which may affect the way learning is organised and can encroach on subsequent outcomes of union learning. The analysis is therefore partitioned into two levels: level one represents learners themselves, a so-called 'within subject effect' (variability between learners within the same workplace); level two concerns the variation of learning outcomes between the workplaces (between group variation). A multilevel framework thus rests on the assumption that every individual experience is unique, but the experiences of individuals within the same group, be it the workplace, household, classroom etc., may be alike. It is this 'within group' similarity that comes to the forefront of multilevel modelling, a feature that makes multilevel design far more robust than conventional uni-dimensional statistical analysis.

Second, a nested sample of learners and employers opens up space for estimating the effects of contextual variables at the organisational level, which are not available in the main learner survey nor in its longitudinal subset. With these advantages in mind, an analysis was conducted of the relationships between the frequency of learning, qualification progression and outcomes accruable to learners, employers and trade unions. The outcomes were defined in terms of job satisfaction, soft and hard outcomes of learning (outcomes accruable to learners), learners' participation in trade unions (an outcome accruable to trade unions) and

the impact of learning on organisational performance to represent employers' gains (measured here by five items from the employer survey, capturing perceived impact of learning on organisational performance in general, health and safety at work, staff turnover, employees' organisational commitment and the quality of relationships with trade unions).

5.2 'Soft' outcomes

Table 5.1 reports the outcomes of regression analysis, a type of statistical modelling that tests an association between the variables of interest. The statistical analysis suggests that frequent learners (those reporting multiple episodes of learning) benefit when it comes to soft outcomes. The effect is a bit weaker and holds up only for learners with three and more episodes of learning in relation to job satisfaction. That said, learning frequency featured as a robust amplifier of soft outcomes of learning, an effect that has been previously observed in the longitudinal sample of learners.

Somewhat surprisingly, qualification progression was not statistically important for job satisfaction and soft outcomes of learning. It did, however, contribute substantially to organisational performance, with workplaces where learners attained formal qualification levels outperforming those organisations where union learning had not resulted in qualification progression.

Unlike qualification progression, having multiple episodes of learning was seemingly irrelevant for organisational performance. **This suggests that qualification progression is as more important for employers, whereas learning frequency is more beneficial for individuals.**

Table 5.1: Soft outcomes of learning and organisational performance			
	Job satisfaction <i>Regression coefficient</i> <i>(critical value)</i>	Soft outcomes of learning <i>Regression coefficient</i> <i>(critical value)</i>	Organisational performance <i>Regression coefficient</i> <i>(critical value)</i>
Qualification progression (the same or lower level)	-0.026 (-0.313)	-0.031 (-0.42)	0.080* (2.488)
Qualification progression (higher level)	0.049 (-0.559)	-0.066 (-0.692)	0.122** (2.764)
Frequency (twice)	-0.055 (0.703)	0.221** (2.865)	0.008 (0.224)
Frequency (three times and more)	0.143* (2.162)	0.421*** (6.036)	-0.017 (-0.546)

Source: ULF Evaluation 2016 learner and employer surveys
*Sample: 865 learners nested on 75 workplaces. Significance codes: '****' 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05.*
All regression models are controlled for sector, industry (using SIC codes), workplace size, organisational size, gender composition of the workforce, learners' demographics (gender, age, mother tongue), occupational characteristics of learners and income.
All regressions are random intercept linear models, except for the organisational performance one, owing to the fact that a dependent variable was measured at level two (the workplace level). Unstandardised Beta coefficients are reported.

5.3 'Hard' outcomes

Further analysis was undertaken with regard to the hard outcomes of learning (a new job with current employer, a pay rise, a promotion, better skilled in current job) and trade union gains (more involved in the union, became a union rep). Table 5.2 presents the findings and shows there was a strong indication of a positive association between multiple episodes of learning, notably if learners had taken part in three and more episodes, and hard outcomes of learning. **Persistency in union learning was rewarded by higher probabilities of getting a new job, securing a pay rise, gaining promotion at the workplace or being able to do the current job better.**

Table 5.2: Hard outcomes of learning and trade union gains						
	New job with current employer <i>Coefficient (critical value)</i>	Pay rise <i>Coefficient (critical value)</i>	Promotion <i>Coefficient (critical value)</i>	Can do job better <i>Coefficient (critical value)</i>	More involved in union <i>Coefficient (critical value)</i>	Became ULR <i>Coefficient (critical value)</i>
Qualification progression (the same or lower level)	0.319 (0.722)	-0.123 (-0.328)	0.096 (0.359)	0.029 (0.111)	0.370 (1.347)	0.568 (1.707)
Qualification progression (higher level)	0.233 (0.415)	0.854 (1.849)	0.548 (1.542)	0.690 (1.474)	0.474 (1.196)	0.688 (1.509)
Frequency (twice)	1.532** (2.907) odds = 4.63	1.364*** (3.301) odds = 3.91	1.194*** (3.522) odds = 3.30	0.497 (1.670)	0.903** (2.880) odds = 2.47	1.660** (3.252) odds = 5.26
Frequency (three times and more)	1.281* (2.555) odds = 3.60	1.039** (2.658) odds = 2.83	1.744*** (5.615) odds = 5.72	1.212*** (4.363) odds = 3.36	2.424*** (8.246) odds = 11.29	3.267*** (6.911) odds = 26.23
<p><i>Source: ULF Evaluation 2016 learner and employer surveys</i> <i>Sample: 865 learners nested on 75 workplaces. Significance codes: '****' 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05.</i> <i>All regression models are controlled for sector, industry (SIC codes), workplace size, organisational size, gender composition of the workforce, learners' demographics (gender, age, mother tongue), occupational characteristics of learners and income.</i> <i>Regression models reported in the table are random intercept logit regressions; coefficients reported are log of odds ratio.</i></p>						

The same relationship was observed in terms of union gains, as learning frequency increased the probability of learners being more supportive towards trade unions or becoming a union learning representative. The interpretation of statistical outputs here is similar to the previous table, except the regression coefficients are presented as log of odds ratio, which are then translated into odds. The interpretation of odds is fairly straightforward. Turning to the first hard outcome of learning (the likelihood of getting a new job with current employer), the reported odds ratio implies that learners who had taken part in two episodes of learning were 4.63 times more likely to get a new job than those for whom union learning was a one-off opportunity. Other odds ought to be interpreted along the same line. The effect of learning frequency was particularly conspicuous in relation to the

outcomes accruable to trade unions, in that odds for frequent learners, with three and more episodes of learning, reached as high as 11.29 (the likelihood of being more involved in a trade union) and 26.23 (chances of becoming a union learning representative). Last but not least, congruent with the analysis of soft outcomes of learning, qualification progression did not feature prominently as an amplifier of hard learning outcomes; nor did it make any difference to the trade unions' gains.

5.4 Summary

To sum up, the analysis of a nested sample of learners and employers provided further insights into the mutual gains of union learning. It was demonstrated explicitly that both learning frequency (expressed as multiple episodes of learning), as opposed to union learning as a one-off experience, alongside qualification progression delivered tangible and intangible benefits to learners, employers and trade unions alike. More nuanced conclusions were variable though, with the frequency of learning being a significant amplifier of gains accrued to learners and trade union, but not towards employers. Employers benefited a great deal from qualification progression as a result of union learning, but not from learning frequency as such. That these results were corroborated by the analysis of multilevel data leaves little doubt relating to the relevance of union learning for all parties involved. The evaluation suggests that the combination of trade union, employer and learner gains is important: the gains for one, help reinforce gains for another. Central to these outcomes is the interplay between multiple episodes of learning and qualification progression.

6 Union project managers' action learning sets

6.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings from a series of action learning sets with ULF project managers. A total of 22 ULF project managers participated in action learning sets, providing the opportunity to share and discuss both the challenges they face in administering their respective projects, and potential avenues of best practice. These project managers represented 18 trade unions, and were responsible for 60 per cent of Round 16 projects and half of all projects in Rounds 15 and 16 (combined) of the Union Learning Fund. Five action learning groups were held across the country between November 2015 and January 2016: two in London, and the remaining groups in Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds. Typically, groups ran for two hours. The rationale for this mode of research and its theoretical basis is outlined below.

The Action Learning Set approach enables participants to reflect on experiences, share practice and examine possible solutions. Each group was facilitated by an experienced group facilitator, supported by a note taker. Group members reported briefly on key issues facing them and the group then chose an issue to discuss further and agree who would discuss that topic in further detail. The issue 'presenter' described their situation, problem or challenge. The group asked open questions to help the presenter develop a deeper or different understanding. The group was encouraged not to give advice, tell anecdotes or pass judgement but support 'presenters', review options and decide on possible actions. The facilitator's role was to establish ground rules and keep the group on course and focused on the presenter. Four of the groups were audio-recorded to complement note taking for a more accurate account of the challenges and solutions raised.

The following represents a summary of these challenges facing project delivery, themed by the most frequently occurring issues, coupled with solutions developed or proposed by unions to address issues faced. Other commentary from the groups adds union officer perspectives on recommendations as to how union learning could be enhanced through either increased collaboration within unions, between union learning teams, in working with unionlearn or with wider stakeholders within the learning and skills system in the UK.

6.2 Changes to ULF funding

The most widely cited challenge facing ULF project managers concerned reductions in funding, reflecting the wider context of cuts to Adult Skills and Further Education budgets. As reported earlier, unionlearn has absorbed much of the loss in BIS grant funding, although projects in 2015/16 had received almost £2 million less than that received in 2012/13. There has been a trend of reduced funding for some time that has cumulated in levels that are perceived, currently, to be having an adverse impact on project outcomes and sustainability. Overall funding was below the level of previous projects and that requested in bid submissions. This was perceived to have adversely affected the ability of projects to deliver learning on the scale desired and meet the demand for learning.

The decrease in ULF funding was coupled with changes in the external environment where the learning providers that ULF projects regularly work with are less able to access public funding for courses, which project managers reported had led to significantly fewer opportunities for learners. Reduced funding for provision also puts unions in a weaker position to engage with employers over learning and negotiate, for example, for ULR facility time or (paid) time off for staff to attend learning. In the extremity, working links that unions have with employers had ceased as projects were unable to access learning opportunities for employees.

One union noted that they had previously worked with around 100 employers, but this had declined to about 15. The project manager attributed this to the fact that they had less to offer organisations. Due to reduced funding, the union claimed to have lost the ability to offer skills for life courses, some ESOL, NVQs and learning in response to redundancy. The response to this situation by many projects was to source alternative forms of learning from, for example, third sector and community providers or to develop on-line learning platforms through third party agreements with trusted learning providers. However, these alternative were seen as limiting the scope to engage the most vulnerable groups of workers and were reducing the scope to offer accredited provision. Where funding had been reduced, typically it was administrative resources that had been cut as a result. This was seen to have created additional time pressures on the project staff that remain. Of principal concern was the disjuncture between the amount of time funded for project administration and that actually spent on such duties. The expected time spent was no more than one day per week, but with the move to monthly outcome reports, audits, and so forth, administrative duties now take up considerably more time in the working week. Ultimately this takes time away from core roles focused on developing working relationships with providers and employers and in supporting ULRs.

6.3 Project duration

There was agreement amongst project managers that one-year projects limit their ability to be strategic and innovative in the delivery of projects. Regarding strategy, short-term projects place emphasis on short-term outcomes, which makes it difficult to adopt a long-term vision. By the end of the first quarter of projects, managers were already preparing bids for the next round of projects. This presents a number of challenges: managers do not have the chance to see what actually works in the existing project, which results in estimating projected outcomes – figures which are then tied into new project contracts. Achieving these targets was made more challenging by inevitable changes in the external environment during the time that elapses from bid submission to delivery, for example responding to new government policy changes. Simultaneously, spending time developing a 'strong' bid also detracts from the delivery of current projects.

Short-term projects impact on innovation. With an increased emphasis on performance and reporting (discussed further below), project teams resort to 'bankers' i.e. what they know will guarantee a certain level of outputs. Establishing relations with an employer, generating learning agreements, and forging new links with training providers, all takes time that project managers felt that they no longer have. The original objectives of unionlearn that centred on activities such as engaging difficult

employers and hard-to-reach learners were argued to have slipped from focus due to time pressures in delivering short-term targets. In terms of a potential resolution to the challenges associated with year-long project durations, there was agreement from all project managers involved that if projects were extended to a minimum of two years, it would help to alleviate many of the aforementioned issues.

6.4 Measuring and reporting impacts/outcomes

A key message from all action learning sets was that the quantity of outcome reports required from project teams had increased considerably. In the context of budget cuts, it was recognised that there was a greater requirement for rigorous and systematic performance monitoring, particularly in accounting for public funding. Yet, the frequency and content of reports had increased, resulting in the feeling amongst many that they were “managing rather than delivering”. In particular, for those unions who represented geographically dispersed members (notably in the construction and arts industries) it was increasingly time-consuming to gather relevant information. The increase in data had not led to a consequent increase in the intelligence shared about the performance of the ULF fund projects, either individually or collectively. Yet, such networking can be effective in helping to drive quality improvements and embed learning within the union.

For project managers, the primary measures of success were seen as the number of individuals who attend courses, achieve qualifications, and so forth. There was some debate about the most appropriate way to measure ‘success’, with a view that impact may be a better signifier than crude output measures alone. A focus on impact could include consideration of the number of individuals who accessed learning via the unions who otherwise would not have received opportunities to learn. This measure of ‘added-value’ has been considered in earlier sections, notably the learner survey, as a means to evaluate deadweight. Nevertheless, project managers argued that such impact indicators are largely neglected, thereby under-representing the extent to which projects provide added value. Some managers suggested that ‘impact’ should incorporate data on the qualitative differences made to participants’ lives both at work and in their community. An example given was the number of individuals able to improve their basic English and literary skills through the union route who are now in a position to help their children with school homework and in wider communities – the so-called ‘social benefits’ generated by projects.

From the project management perspective, where impact is evaluated it tends to be too employer-focused, when learner needs and outcomes should be central to the assessment of impact. While there is some validity to this position, it is also important to recognise that, first, there has been a large body of individual case studies published by unionlearn and, second, any wider evaluation of learner needs and outcomes needs to be sensitive to underlying challenges around sampling and access to learners’ voices.

The increased requirement for reporting was a demand placed not only on project managers but individual learners too, who may take some responsibility for tracking their personal development. A concern raised by some project managers was the unwillingness of some members to share personal information and for ‘form filling’, and continued attempts to gather more information from learners, it was suggested,

may lead to a significant proportion distancing themselves from union learning. It is, however, feasible to suggest that unions have a role to communicate to members that in order to sustain levels of funding (that provide valuable learning opportunities) this is a necessary requirement. Overall, though, these concerns do raise questions around the limits to the amount of information collected that can be reasonably be expected of projects and learners.

6.5 Relations between unionlearn, BIS and union learning projects

Effective communication between project teams and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills was regarded as a considerable obstacle to a more coherent and comprehensive delivery of learning opportunities by unions. The key issue here was perceived by project managers to be a lack of *full* understanding by BIS about the workplace challenges unions face in the delivery of projects and desired outcomes.

The fit of the ULF to workplace learning needs

Several unions, notably those representing specialist technical and professional workers, explained that the narrowing focus of the ULF meant that there were increased pressures on matching ULF project requirements to workplace needs. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), for example, had withdrawn from the ULF, given what they perceived to be the now limited scope to match ULF priorities with what members and workplace partners desire/require. The increased focus on learners with functional skills and apprenticeships meant that there was little fit between the activity that the ULF supports and the demand for learning needs amongst RCN members. The argument put forward was that a membership with a high proportion of university degrees (including postgraduate level) were not primarily concerned with improving their basic English and maths skills. Continued professional development (CPD) is an essential part of career progression in certain professions and unions and their members would be well served to present a robust case to BIS demonstrating the value of more relevant, appropriate learning activities for such memberships. That said, even though there is a strong emphasis in the ULF on basic English and maths skills there is no reason per se why projects cannot focus on more professional needs and demands.

Reflecting specific contexts

A number of project workers were located in industries with a predominantly freelance workforce, where workers do not have an employer or workplace. Some project managers felt that a core base assumption within the unionlearn 'model' was that of ULF activity taking place in larger workplaces with a team of ULRs. Yet increasingly, union members are freelance, self-employed and working in so called 'atypical' employment. Where the volume of output targets had been maintained or increased, this was reported as daunting, given that a learning model based around large ULR teams organising learning does not fit with many of the projects based in smaller specialist unions. One proposition mooted was to tailor outcomes and targets for specific unions, or groups of unions. Following such a system, certain unions could be tasked with focusing on CPD for their higher-skilled membership and presented with targets that reflect this, and other unions (who do well in meeting targets for English, maths, and so forth) to have their targets for functional skills adjusted accordingly.

Other unions operated in a context where learners were geographically dispersed and mobile. This included learners that worked on building sites, which are not conducive to the set-up of workplace courses (with limited access to computers), or that included members that drive vehicles to specific locations to do one-off jobs. Similarly, employees are often not even entirely sure who their employer was due to umbrella organisations sub-contracting work. One example of such an environment was the high profile infrastructure development at Hinkley Point. In this case the scope for unions to engage employers was clearly valued, but delays beyond the control of the union impacted project delivery thereby putting substantial pressure on outcomes. Some project managers stressed that these more project-specific challenges were unlikely to be addressed without BIS engaging more directly with them – through discussions, visiting particular locations and engaging with project teams, learning centre volunteers, and so forth. Communication was not helped by the fact that key BIS contacts change frequently and project managers felt that no legacy was left; that they have to keep starting from scratch in terms of showing the value of union learning and explaining the unique role of unions at the workplace to each new incumbent.

The complexity of unionlearn's role, in terms of balancing support versus performance management, was appreciated. However, several project managers noted that they felt increasingly 'policed', as unionlearn served as the mechanism through which BIS administers a service contract. On the other hand, managers recognised the work of unionlearn in mediating and managing expectations and championing the work of unions with BIS and other national stakeholders. The impact of budget cuts was seen to have impacted on the support that unionlearn could offer. As noted earlier, unionlearn absorbed a large proportion of funding cuts to the ULF, in order to protect the resource going direct to unions. One consequence of this was the restructuring of regional unionlearn provision, which led project managers to rue the lack of regional support and knowledge that had been invaluable to project effectiveness in the past. The point was raised by project managers that it was unreasonable and inefficient for individual projects to hold key relationships with a large range of learning and skills providers. The loss of regional networks was compounded by the loss of national union development officers that had a specific understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing specific unions.

6.6 Sharing best practice amongst unions and projects

Communication between unions and project teams presents an important issue and opportunity for the Union Learning Fund moving forward. There was recognition through the Action Learning Sets that project managers may be trying to address similar challenges and that there is considerable scope to increase the sharing of good practice (and lesson learned) between projects, with project managers acknowledging they have responsibility to take the lead role on this.

Attempting to attribute why practice was currently not shared more readily, project managers indicated a move away from more collegiate relations between unions as a result of the tendering process for bidding. Amidst a sense of increasing competition for funding it was reported by some that feelings of 'don't let anyone know what is in your bid' dominate. In reality, many of the same specific issues surfaced for all unions, notably difficulties in recruiting ULRs and how best to engage employers regarding

apprenticeship programmes. It was suggested that unionlearn could help to identify those unions that were delivering effectively against certain key outcomes and then incentivise them to share good practice (knowledge exchange) across projects. Ultimately, of course, the responsibility for such networking of good practice lies with the unions themselves.

There was agreement that most projects had developed different systems for delivering or monitoring the very same activities. Where so-called 'best practice' had been shared between unions, this was viewed as a positive development. For example, effectively tracking learners was seen as a challenge for many unions, and in an attempt to overcome this URTU liaised with and utilised the POA tracking system: an online system that proves particularly useful where e-learning takes place. URTU also visited Britannia to observe the BSU's tracking methods. Both URTU and UCATT project managers acknowledged the positive elements of the CWU's system – noting that tracking does not stop with a good system purely in technological terms, but that they have a strong committee of people overseeing the tracking process as a whole. Undoubtedly there is a lot of scope here for sharing practice in order to tackle particular issues and agreeing common standards.

It was recognised that unionlearn had asked project managers about issues faced that could be discussed at project manager meetings, but that this has elicited limited response from unions. Reflections on the Action Learning Set by participants led to further commentary on how these meetings could be used in the future to help share practice. Firstly, core shared challenges and priorities for developing the ULF should be identified (building on the themes identified from this evaluation). A schedule of topics for knowledge exchange could be identified and planning into future project manager meetings or dedicated good practice events. ULF Project Manager meetings could have a standard agenda, with updates on how the ULF is performing as a whole and upcoming changes/points of information, before moving on to agreed items where a range of sub-themes could be discussed either collectively or in small groups (for example unionlearn innovation in ULR training; tracking learners; supporting apprentices). These sections could function along an Action Learning Set model, so that participants identify good practice improvements that they commit to taking action on and report back to the theme group at future events.

6.7 Union attitudes towards the learning agenda

An issue that was attributed a considerable degree of importance by project managers was the perceived continued indifference to learning within some union hierarchies. Questions continue to be raised about learning as a "real" union issue and the feeling that some ULRs may be seen to be 'cosy' with employers. Apathy to the union role in the learning agenda results in a focus on other priorities, which partly accounts for the lack of pro-activeness highlighted previously. While this context had changed considerably it was still perceived to be a barrier to the development of learning activities in some cases. In terms of counter-acting this indifference, projects were gathering and sharing data on the benefits for unions of supporting learning. For example, union learning has directly led to the recruitment of new members, and fostered more favourable and trusting relations with employers in some workplaces. However, there is a continued need to capture and promote these wider benefits in order to mainstream the learning agenda within unions.

6.8 Recruiting ULRs and sustaining ULR activity

Many project managers saw the recruitment and training of ULRs as a continuing issue, and one that has been prevalent for some projects over time. As seen in the analysis of the employer survey, the average number of ULRs per workplace has nearly halved between 2010 and 2015. Yet the importance of ULRs cannot be understated - there is a reliance on ULRs to have good relations with the many stakeholders in each workplace for effective learning (staff including non-members, management, other ULRs, and training providers). Difficulties in recruiting and training new learning reps is compounded by the high turnover in staff across many organisations, which equally affects ULRs themselves. ULR facility time has also been cut back by employers, particularly in the government sector. For example, in one government department, active PCS ULRs have gone from over 1,000 to a couple of hundred. If a key ULR moves on from a workplace then in many cases learning activity typically stops. If ULRs are no longer the drivers of delivery, the emphasis is placed on project workers in driving activity to achieved learning outcomes, making union learning more vulnerable to cuts in ULF funding.

If the goal of the ULF is to create a sustainable learning infrastructure ULRs are central to this model. Encouraging workers to take up this voluntary rep role is a delicate balance of persuasion and support and a more responsive training system is needed to ensure interest is turned into ULR recruitment and learning activity. Unions noted a number of innovations to address the challenges faced in recruiting and training ULRs that may be of use to their colleagues. UCATT and URTU have expanded the roles of some shop stewards to include 'ULR duties', and even some training that has represented a myriad of both sets of training (a 'mixed pathway'). USDAW have brought into all rep training an hour of learning (emphasising the importance of learning, what the role of ULRs entail, and so forth) in order to mainstream the learning agenda. Yet, many shop stewards were faced with urgent workplace issues and casework. It was suggested that learning would be further down their agenda and relying on shop stewards to address any gap in ULR recruitment was not a solution to build long-term sustainability. Other innovations were around the delivery of the '5 day' training and the creation of a 'taster' of the role for people to see exactly what it entails before the registration process.

6.9 Funding learning provision

Changes in the rules around the public funding of learning have placed a greater emphasis on engaging employers to increase their contribution to learning – for example, through Collective Learning Fund models. In many instances learners themselves have to part-fund their learning, yet, projects managers asserted that many of the individuals targeted by unions are not able to afford this, especially as it was noted that the costs of provision have increased sharply. One project manager noted that level 1 IT courses now cost more than level 3 courses used to cost learners (£200+). This in turn reduces the number of those able to fund their own learning, resulting in smaller group sizes that are often not considered viable by local providers. That said, as the findings of the learner survey indicate there is high demand amongst learners for more learning, and many learners also seem open to at least part-funding such learning.

6.10 Engaging employers around apprenticeships

With the current focus on apprenticeships, ULF project teams sometimes noted difficulty in engaging with employers around apprenticeship programmes. There was a sense that many employers and providers have agreements in place, with little interest or sense of need for union involvement. A number of suggestions and initiatives were outlined in attempting to tackle this issue. Notably, where apprenticeship programmes were already in place, unions should approach organisations and make the case for union added value in supporting apprentices: emphasising that unions do not deliver the apprenticeship programmes, but provide complementary support for apprentices and employers.

Another example was provided by USDAW who were developing 'pre-apprenticeships' at Tesco stores to combat difficulties in accessing apprenticeship schemes. Unions could advertise pre-apprenticeships as a means through which individuals could increase their chances of gaining apprenticeship opportunities thereafter, thus generating a role for themselves in the process. The GMB were targeting a greater number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage them in apprenticeships as many of the larger organisations in which they operate already have established apprenticeship programmes.

6.11 Working with learning providers

The shift in emphasis towards accredited vocational and foundational learning changes the nature of relationships with those learning providers that support different elements of ULF programmes. This affects the coherence with which unions coordinate learning activities, and increases the time spent sourcing and communicating with multiple providers. Project managers stressed the need to increase the sharing of knowledge about providers and those with experience in effectively supporting different types of union learning. Better communication with learning providers was also seen as necessary, particularly in respect of apprenticeship programmes. It seems that in some cases learning providers view union and ULRs as policing their activity; and some give the impression that they would prefer that unions were not involved in the process at all. Project managers suggested a need for discourse with providers at a more strategic level, to agree approaches to engaging employers and being involved with employers and providers at the outset to establish good practice.

Project managers called for recognition that engaging unions in learning is cost-effective, in terms of helping to deliver learning at scale and helping to assure the quality of learning delivery. Project managers also noted that there was limited recognition of the value of this role particularly given the levered in contributions that unions, ULRs, employers and learners all make via ULF supported programmes. Unions could therefore raise awareness that they are not only advocates of what 'good' workplace learning looks like, but offer significant value for money within this process too.

6.12 Summary

In the context of reduced learning and skills funding there has undoubtedly been a 'retreat' by unions, with many seeing a decrease across indicators such as numbers of union learning representatives, the number of employers engaged with, and so forth. In order to sustain delivery in this climate a number of challenges and opportunities were identified. It was clear from those who administer and manage projects that there remains a great deal of scope for advancing the ULF. Responsibility for overcoming these challenges does not lie purely with BIS and unionlearn. Project managers accepted that they have a key role to play in sharing best practice with each other and more could be done to this end. Project managers acknowledged that internal union issues could act as a barrier to mainstreaming learning activity and that this requires effort to showcase the value of learning both with wider partners in the skills system and with unions themselves to help and integrate learning teams within union structures.

7 Stakeholder Interviews

7.1 Introduction

This section summarises the findings from interviews with 12 national stakeholders undertaken to supplement the survey research. The aim of these interviews was to identify the understanding and perception of union-led learning in general, the work of unionlearn in particular and the relation to wider developments and priorities within the UK learning and skills system. The interviews were undertaken by a mix of face-to-face and telephone methods during January and February 2016. The interviewees were suggested by unionlearn as contacts with whom unionlearn had been undertaking joint work on activity beyond the direct delivery of the ULF.

Interviews were undertaken with the Association of Colleges (notably around the relations with the FE sector with whom unions and unionlearn staff liaise to provide access to opportunities for learners and training for union learning reps), Cogent (as an example of a Sector Skills Council with whom unionlearn and unions have worked on sector skills activity), the CBI and EEF (as employer representative bodies engaged in policy dialogue over skills). The union interviewees included senior union industrial officers (not those directly involved in the delivery of ULF activity, but those engaged in wider dialogue on skills with employers, government and other stakeholders). Finally, respondents were from two organisations, PROCAT (college of advanced technology) and Movement to Work (a social enterprise promoting a national model for work placement for young people), where Tom Wilson, the (former) director of unionlearn was a Board member contributing a union view within the governance of these organisations¹⁰. A list of interviews is contained at Appendix 4. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted an average of 45 minutes and covered the following themes: background and stance on learning and skills; engagement with trade unions and awareness of union learning; outcomes and added value of union learning; tensions around union-led learning and opportunities for further engagement.

7.2 Background on UK workforce learning and skills

Given the range of stakeholders and specific functions of their organisations, commentary on the broader landscape of learning and skills in the UK varied considerably. Common themes raised were as follows: the apprenticeship levy; funding priorities for learning and skills; the transition towards an 'employer-led' skills system; the devolution of skills budgets and related change in the organisational infrastructure supporting UK skills.

A key theme of discussion centred on the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. Some comments relate to the specific timing of the interviews: the amount that employers would be required to pay had been announced in the Budget, but the detail of the process, what employers might benefit from and the governance arrangements surrounding this were not known. The uncertainty around the levy meant that some respondents, notably those from the employers' organisations and union industrial officers, noted that employers they worked with were raising concerns about the

¹⁰ Liz Rees has now replaced Tom Wilson on the board of Movement to Work

impact of the levy on their own apprenticeship programmes and wider workforce training and development. Those with well-respected existing apprenticeship programmes were not sure how the levy would affect their investment in current provision. Employers were concerned that a possible consequence of the target for 3 million apprentices by 2020 would adversely affect the quality of provision. Others commented that the impact of the levy might lead to employers reducing other training for the existing workforce to cover the cost of the levy. Finally, respondents thought the focus on apprenticeships and initial vocational education and training (IVET) meant that opportunities for continued workforce development (CVET) were likely to be reduced, even though CVET was seen as essential in enabling organisations to innovate and effectively adapt to change.

A second theme explored was the policy emphasis placed on the transition towards an employer-led skills system. There was a cautious welcome for this, yet respondents' comments illustrate different conceptions of what 'employer-led' means. For some, the focus is on ensuring that skills provision is more responsive to industry needs, requiring improved collaboration between industry and providers. Others explained that 'employer-led' refers more to the governance arrangements surrounding the allocation of publicly funded skills budgets, reflected for example in the devolution of responsibilities for the Adult Skills Budget to Combined Authorities guided by the strategic plans developed by LEPs which are dominated by employer interests and with virtually no engagement with unions or representatives of workers or learners. Respondents also suggested that the employers involved in these new arrangements don't necessarily represent the interests of all employers and their needs from the skills system in the longer term at the local level. The often changing institutional arrangements and focus of initiatives around skills often serve to confuse employers who then lack understanding of how best to engage and where to seek impartial advice about where to engage with the learning and skills system.

7.3 Awareness of union learning and union added value

Partners highlighted a number of core areas where they felt that unions added value to improving learning and skills. Five areas were identified: building engagement with employers and learners; operating at multiple levels in the skills system; brokerage; supporting learner progression; promoting ethical practice and upholding standards. Respondents noted the traditional role unions have played in promoting skills and supporting apprenticeships and union effectiveness at encouraging higher commitment to training amongst employers and staff. This was founded on existing relationships that unions have with employers and members. One respondent noted:

'Businesses, unions and their reps are experts on what will make a difference on the ground'
(CBI)

Those respondents championing skills needs within specific sectors, such as PROCAT, COGENT and the EEF, noted that work with unions on the learning agenda was closely aligned. Working with union officers in skilled engineering and manufacturing sectors includes work at multiple levels, covering specific workplaces and company-wide initiatives with some of the UK's largest manufacturers at the UK and European levels. For example, Unite industrial officers were working with international partners in the automotive sector to identify the future skills requirements of workers in that sector.

It was also noted that the increased emphasis on an employer-led model within the skills system required employers to articulate their demand for skills and training in a complex and often changing market for provision. In this context, union understanding of this changing system and the specific challenges faced by employers and workers enables unions (where they operate) to provide a unique 'brokerage' function connecting employers, learners and providers. This role was perceived to be unique in that, as several respondents noted, organisations in the UK skills system may have good working relationships with learners or with employers, but rarely with both.

Other stakeholders noted the complementarity of their work to the activity of unions and unionlearn. For example, movement2work supports young people aged 14-16 to participate in quality work experience. Connecting with workplace unions can help to provide support not only for this specific initiative but also to help engage and encourage those young people to move into apprenticeship programmes as they complete their schooling. However, working links with unions were currently limited.

Partners noted the capacity of unions to engage adult learners, notably, but not exclusively, those in lower grade occupations, and encourage them to participate and progress into learning. Stakeholders also emphasised the union role in supporting engagement, completion and progression from one learning level to another or to moving from informal to more formal learning opportunities, making the transition from one learning system (such as adult education) into another (such as employer, FE or HE). This was noted as an important function, given that many of the year 2030 workforce are already in work but need to adapt to the changes taking place at work (see for example the UKCES report in 2014 on work futures¹¹).

The final area of value provided by unions with the workplace learning and skills system was seen to be in relation to promoting good practice referred to by some respondents as ethical practice around learning and development. The trade unions' role in supporting learners enables them to act as advocates for learning and learners. This helps to ensure learning experiences meet acceptable standards and holds employers and providers to account in maintaining quality standards. Respondents noted the legitimate role for unions to do this because of their long-standing presence in the workplace and close understanding of learner and workplace needs. A number of approaches were highlighted where stakeholders work with unions and unionlearn to champion quality. Examples included the TUC and Unite Apprenticeship Charters which contain key provisions relating to fair pay, trade union involvement in the programme and commitments to ensure young people receive high quality training. They represent a commitment from the employer, union and unionlearn that there will be an ongoing drive to monitor and improve the quality of programmes. Other examples include union input into the development of approaches that set good standards for skills and training, such as COGENT's safety passports for drivers in the petroleum sector, drawing on experience of the union's health and safety and education experts.

¹¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303334/er84-the-future-of-work-evidence-report.pdf

7.4 Tensions around union-led learning

Some of the tensions noted by stakeholders in relation to working with unions and unionlearn related to their, self-acknowledged, limited understanding of the operational activities of unions in general and union-led learning in particular. However, a number of key points were raised and, while recognising that these may be based on perceptions rather than fact, these were nevertheless noted as potential obstacles to further joint working. Respondents who had less direct engagement with unions held different perceptions about the role and stance of unions on apprenticeships. Some felt that unions were only interested in 'gold-plated' apprenticeships that offered a high training wage and all but guaranteed employment to apprentices. Others felt that unions only engaged on issues related to terms and conditions, and did not understand the role of unions and ULRs in supporting apprentices. One respondent noted that some in unions were against apprenticeships: seeing apprentices as a threat to the jobs of the established workforce. Interestingly, this was not the view held by employers' organisations, who were very positive about the role that unions could play in supporting apprenticeship programmes and helping to assure quality.

Other respondents noted an apparent decline in engagement from unions and unionlearn in partnership activity. Several of those interviewed noted that they previously had closer working relationships with the TUC and unionlearn on specific programmes of work. An example cited was joint work on researching occupational segregation in apprenticeships. This had led to further connections between organisations in taking action on apprenticeships. However, key contacts had moved on and these closer working relationships had not been sustained.

The union respondents noted the tendency for higher level training to be prevalent in unionised workplaces where joint approaches are taken on training. Yet, tensions were recognised where employers may focus on short-term learning needs and unions may advocate broader industry interests that support longer-term employability, future sector skills needs and higher quality provision. Several respondents noted that working progressively to address this tension was at the heart of union learning; a unique approach that helps to address potential market-failures in training. However, creating mechanisms that help to reconcile these tensions was problematic, in that there were limited longer-term structures that could promote this dialogue. Examples were given of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC), historically, and more recently the UK Commission on Employment and Skills (UKCES), as bodies that engaged unions as valued partners in the wider skills system. Yet, these arrangements were not seen as stable, unlike the situation in other countries which often have stronger and longer-term institutional structures that connect partners across the skills and training systems.

Respondents noted the potential impact of the changing political consensus and the role of unions and unionlearn in working with government and its agencies. This was manifest in the changing emphasis of funding for adult learning and skills, whereby the narrowing of focus on apprenticeships and foundational skills limited broader engagement with other partners on themes such as CPD for professional workers or vocational learning for adults – a finding that to some extent corroborates the concerns expressed earlier of project workers. The reduction and narrowing of public

funding opportunities coupled with the reduction in training opportunities offered by some employers was noted as creating tensions for unions that were raising the demand for learning that subsequently they were unable to help learners meet. Partners had various responses to this as an issue for unions. Some noted that they were working with unions to make representations to government around learning and skills policy. Others noted that the funding landscape had radically changed and, for example, with the introduction of advanced learner loans, unions needed to:

“get real and work with us in this new world.”

The issue of the devolution of skills budgets, notably the adult skills budget, was discussed by several stakeholders. While the potential benefit of local level decision-making on addressing skills needs was recognised, respondents also noted possible tensions for working with unions at the national and sectoral level and developing coherent responses that, for example, addressed the needs of larger employers with sites in different locations across the UK. It was noted that engaging directly with new and emerging local structures presents a challenge for unions whose own capacity to engage is under pressure from cuts in funding for union learning and pressure on union facility time.

7.5 Opportunities for further engagement with unions on learning

Despite the tensions articulated, stakeholders noted considerable potential for enhancing the collaboration with unions and unionlearn. The introduction of the apprenticeship levy for larger firms was felt to be a specific opportunity, although also possibly a threat for unions if they do not engage with wider partners and providers. There was concern however, around the changes affecting UKCES and the increased role for LEPs and Combined Authorities with the devolution of skills budgets. These changes meant that the union role in championing the voice of employees could be diminished as union presence in these regional structures was minimal. Opportunities to add value by unions was considerable through enhancing employer and employee engagement and in upholding quality standards. Partner organisations noted that to work more effectively there was considerable scope to share plans and identify common goals and interests. There were opportunities to work jointly on learning and skills at all levels from foundation to higher level learning, including apprenticeships at the workplace, sectoral and national levels.

Typically, at the sectoral level, partners such as EEF and COGENT felt that further collaboration and consultation on strategies for sector critical skills would be beneficial for employers and workers in key sectors. This was especially salient where known skill shortages were creating a break on growth and ULF activity could be better aligned with sector skills action plans. At the operational level, unions and providers noted the move towards increased on-line and e-learning platforms, as a response to learning needs, changes in funding and improved online provision. Strategies to extend the learning offer from unions through collaboration with partners offering digital learning platforms was also noted, pointing to the need for unionlearn to help broker these relationship and share good practice between unions on working with third party platform providers and wider stakeholders. It was noted that in the current context there is an urgent need for union and unionlearn to be proactive to ensure that they are not closed out of new arrangements emerging at the regional and national levels in the devolution of skills budgets and development of the apprenticeship levy.

7.6 Summary

The stakeholder interviews identified considerable opportunity to raise awareness with wider partners about the specific contribution of unions in the UK learning and skills system. Stakeholders' understanding of the different roles of TUC/unionlearn, unions and ULRs was weak - even amongst this group that are considered key stakeholders. This stems in part from a broader lack of understanding of trade unions (or fixed perceptions of a certain type of unionism), that does not recognise the degree of co-operation that takes place in UK workplaces between unions, management, workers and a wider range of skills organisations. There is considerable scope for stakeholders across the UK skills system to collaborate in helping employers and workers navigate this complex and changing system more easily. While there is scope for collaboration, tensions inevitably exist between needs and interests that are short-term versus those that are longer-term. The stakeholders noted that these tensions can be managed through co-operation and dialogue at the workplace. Sectoral and national bodies do recognise these tensions and working with unions can help provide a mechanism for that dialogue to take place. Stakeholders recognised the role that unions can play in establishing what good practice looks like, to be an active advocate of quality skills provision and to work directly with employers and employees in negotiating workplace skills strategies.

8 Economic and fiscal impact

8.1 Introduction

This section presents an economic and fiscal evaluation of the overall impact of the ULF. The methodology is derived from an analysis conducted originally by the University of Exeter that accompanied the 2015 survey of union learners (based on Round 15 of the ULF). The methodology adopted for the model is described in Appendix 5 and the model has been updated using new data available from the 2016 survey. It has been reviewed by staff in BIS responsible for statistical modelling and is consistent with the Treasury Green Book protocols.

In brief, it is based on research that demonstrates the extent to which raising individuals' skills and qualifications improves:

- Individual's earnings;
- Individual's likelihood of being in work;
- Employer's productivity.

Information about the returns to learning were applied to union learners who had gained a qualification as a result of their learning. No benefit was assumed for those taking part in unaccredited learning, redundancy support or from information, advice and guidance referrals.

Earnings and employment premia were applied to average wage estimates for people learning at different levels, over the expected duration of their working lives. The benefit was discounted at a rate of 3.5 per cent per annum, to take account of the fact that the benefits of learning diminish with time. We have also estimated the deadweight (i.e. the share of learners who would have taken part in learning without ULF support) in order to isolate the added value of the Union Learning Fund. We have also discounted the negative impact on productivity that results from taking time out from work to take part in learning and for the first time, this year, have also discounted union estimates of the value of investment 'levered' from unions and employers. In practice, 'leverage' may include estimates of 'in-kind' support that have already been included within the productivity foregone calculations but are incorporated within the model in as a matter of prudence.

Other than the inclusion of leverage, the fundamentals of the model remain unchanged from that used to generate an estimate of the economic impact of Round 15 of the ULF. However, slightly different approaches have been taken to measure some of the key variables this time around. While this means the results are not directly comparable, the differences in most cases, are likely to enhance estimates of the model. For example,

- The current learner survey asked respondents directly about their earnings. Previously, these were estimated using national statistics about the average earnings of workers with different levels of qualifications. This variable is used to estimate the impact of learning through the wage premia and productivity foregone while training.

- A slightly different system for classifying highest qualification was used this time around allowing postgraduate qualifications to be separately identified. They were previously included within 'other/overseas qualifications'.
- A more detailed age breakdown was provided allowing for greater accuracy in the years to retirement calculation.

Other differences in measurement approaches include:

- The previous survey asked respondents whether they had gained a higher qualification through their union learning. The latest survey asked respondents about their highest qualification obtained *before* union learning and the highest qualification obtained *through* their union learning and computed a derived variable for qualification progression.
- A composite deadweight variable has been produced using learner responses to a question asking them the extent to which they agreed or disagreed to the following statements: "It is likely that I would have done this learning anyway", "I would not have done this learning without the Union" and "The Union offered learning that is not supported by employer".

The impact model has been updated with revised wage and employment premia (see Appendix 5) and incorporates management information from Round 16 of the Union Learning Fund. We have also increased our estimate of training costs by 4.8% reflecting the percentage change in the Consumer Prices Index for education between December 2014 and December 2015.

8.1 Estimated total impact

Based on this approach, we estimate that ULF Round 16 would have an overall impact of around £1,452 million. This is 58 per cent more (£536 million) than the £917 million estimated during the last survey. The effect of updating each of the 'dynamic' variables – in insolation - in the model is identified in Table 8.1. It shows that applying the new estimates of the number of learners, the proportion who achieve a qualification, the average wage, deadweight and the new wage premia – generate a higher overall impact while revisions to the number of years left in the labour market, including leverage costs and updating the employment premia reduces the estimate. Combined, updating the wage rates and using the revised wage premia, increases the estimate by £255m or 28 per cent over the previous estimate.

The total benefits to individuals are estimated to be £895 million, comprising of £754 million from higher wages and £141 million of improved earnings as a result of being more likely to be in employment. The net benefit to employers resulting from improved productivity of a more highly skilled workforce is £558 million. This is the gross benefit of increased productivity of £754 million less output lost as a result of working time lost to engage in learning of £158 million and less £38m of other investment levered from employers and unions.

Table 8.1: Effect of updating each of the four dynamic variables on the overall estimate of total benefit; change between two estimates (2015-2016)

	£m	% change
Numbers of learners	+£123	+13%
% gaining a qualification	+£99	+11%
No. years left in labour market	-£61	-7%
New wage rates	+£118	+13%
% progressing into learning due to ULF	+£82	+13%
Leverage	-£38	-4%
Wage premia	+£133	+14%
Employment premia	-£7	-1%
Total benefit	+£536	+58%

8.2 Return on investment

As the ULF is principally concerned with brokering learning, it is important to add the cost of delivering the learning associated with the £11m ULF investment when estimating the return on investment.

Applying the unit cost of delivery to the cohort of ULF results in an overall delivery cost of £118 million, made up of £107 million in training costs and £11 million of brokerage/ULF costs. An explanation of the methodology for calculating delivery costs is provided in Appendix 5.

On this basis, we estimate that £1 invested in the Union Learning Fund generates a total economic return of £12.30 of which £7.60 accrues to individuals and £4.70 to employers. This is higher than the previous estimate of £9.15 of which 5.80 accrued to individuals and £3.40 to employers.

8.3 Return by type of provision

The data we have also allows us to estimate the return on investment (RoI) generated by different types of learning, shown in Table 8.2. However, considerable caution is needed in interpreting these results for a number of reasons, particularly because a) RoI is assumed to flow solely from the acquisition of qualifications and b) the proportion of learners gaining qualifications is derived from data for learners who have undertaken one type of learning. Those types of provision that are largely unaccredited (such as informal learning, short courses and events) or which are accredited through multiple episodes (such as CPD events) appear to generate low levels of return on investment. In reality, as we have previously noted, the majority of union learners take part in multiple episodes of learning, combining different forms of provision.

Nonetheless, in broad terms, the data suggests that participation in Further Education programmes and vocational qualifications, Apprenticeships and functional skills and English and maths generates the highest return on investment.

Table 8.2: Return on investment (£) by type of learning	
Type of Learning	Estimated RoI (£)
FE Programmes & Vocational Qualifications	19
Apprenticeships	14
Functional Skills, English & Maths	13
ICT	9
Training to be a ULR	5
Short Courses & CPD	3
Higher Education	-0.2
Informal Learning	-1.5

Training to be an ULR, short courses and CPD generate considerably lower returns. The negative result for informal learning is because the model under-values return on investment in informal learning because much of this type of learning is unaccredited and largely attributed a 'nil' economic value.

For higher education, the collective cost of tuition fees, lost earnings and productivity foregone are estimated to be higher than the nonetheless significant (c. 11%) uplift in earnings generated through the acquisition of graduate level qualifications. Such a finding might be a surprise. However, it is important to bear in mind that the average age of union learners taking part in higher education is estimated to be 50, which significantly reduces the period over which the benefits of increased wages are felt¹².

8.4 Returns to the Exchequer

The Exchequer benefits from learning in many ways, including through the positive impacts on health, reduced crime and increased civic participation explored in the previous chapter. It also benefits from reduced welfare payments, due to individuals being more likely to be in employment, and from reduced dependency on in-work benefits, as a result of increased wages. While these benefits are clearly important, they are impossible to model with any reliability and are therefore discounted from our calculations. These focus on the following estimable benefits:

1. Income Tax on increased individual earnings (15% to Exchequer);
2. National Insurance contributions on increased individual earnings (12% to Exchequer);
3. Increased VAT receipts on consumption resulting from raised incomes (9.7% to Exchequer);
4. Higher employer National Insurance contributions on employee wages (13.8% to Exchequer).

¹² Returns to individuals' investment in higher education (in the form of loans) may be positive (and particularly positive for younger people), as this calculation includes an estimation of lost earnings and productivity foregone.

A limited model, focused solely on increases in these tax receipts suggests that the fiscal return to the Exchequer from learning generated by ULF Round 16 amounts to £420m. Taking into account the both the cost of ULF Round 16 and the cost to partners of delivering ULF generated learning (£103m), the estimated return to the Exchequer is £3.57 for each £1 spent. Clearly this comfortably exceeds the scale of the initial Exchequer investment and is higher than the £2.51 estimated generated by the results of the previous survey.

9 Summary and conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This section summarises the findings from the evaluation study. The section first reflects on the methods used and the limitations to the approach. The section then presents the headline findings and then sets out the study findings drawing together the evidence from the different elements of the study reporting thematically against each of the key evaluation criteria. The final part of the section sets out conclusions and recommendations for the way forward.

9.2 Approach to the evaluation and limitations

Drawing on a large programme of research, this report has presented a detailed evaluation of Rounds 15 and 16 of the ULF. The report has included a mix of qualitative, quantitative and secondary data analysis, integrating different perspectives to ensure that the analysis of the ULF is rigorous, balanced and reliable. The mix of approaches help address the core evaluation questions around understanding the effectiveness and impact of activities supported by ULF funding. These qualitative approaches help to understand if, why and under what conditions outcomes are achieved and how outcomes could be improved. They complement the economic impact evaluation which puts an emphasis on monetary values (discussed in detail in the Appendices report).

It is interesting to note that the ULF began within a policy framework set by Government stressing the importance of lifelong learning. During the lifetime of the ULF, the Government focus has shifted more towards skills for competitiveness. The current rationale for support for the ULF learning relates to the anticipated improvement in competitiveness of businesses and increased opportunities for workers by building their education and skills levels. It is assumed that workers and learners will become more confident and effective in their place of work and more able to navigate the labour market by possessing up-to-date qualifications and skills that are (or will be) in demand. Improving the skills levels of those in work is assumed to benefit the economy, businesses and workers. Hence, the evaluation study has looked at each of these areas through the learner survey, employer survey and economic impact assessment.

Central to the understanding of impact is reporting on the intended ‘target’ groups. Given the diversity of union membership and range of organisations in which unions organise, being clear on the characteristics or intended target group and the profile of actual participants (learners and businesses) is key in understanding whether ULF programmes are having the desired effect in reaching those groups. For many, but not all ULF projects, this includes focusing on providing opportunities for workers that would normally not engage in, or be offered the opportunity of workplace learning. It is assumed that there is a need for government intervention because of recognised ‘market’ failures such as lack of information on learning needs and opportunities, limited knowledge of the returns on investment in learning and the barriers to learning (such as time, confidence to learn, costs of training and childcare) that prevent individuals and employers investing in education and training.

The rationale for **union** involvement in addressing these failures assumes that unions have a unique role that enables them to engage workers and employers around the learning agenda. Key union activities focus on advocating for learning and learners, identifying demand and worker interests around learning; negotiating with employers to build structures at the workplace (learning centres, learning agreements, embedding ULR rights to time off for duties) and brokering partnerships with providers to help turn engagement into participation. An objective of the evaluation is to understand whether these 'market failures' have been addressed and how this is achieved by unions both at the workplace and with support from union learning teams and by TUC/unionlearn.

All evaluation approaches have their strengths and limitations. It has been common for previous evaluations of the ULF to identify significant limitations in the data collected for analytical purposes (Shaw et al, 2006; Stuart et al, 2010). The last major evaluation, by Stuart et al (2010), attempted to address this problem by drawing from a wider range of empirical sources and by introducing a survey of employers. This evaluation has built on this approach, and for the first time been able to integrate a large-scale survey of learners. Early evaluations had attempted this, but with limited success. This analysis has looked at benchmark data comparing the employer and learner surveys to relevant data from earlier ULF studies and, where appropriate, other national data sets. It has also been able to analyse a sub-set of data from learners with data pertaining to the organisations they work in, the so-called 'nested' data. This helps understand learner outcomes in relation to the context in which they work. In addition to this, the evaluation has followed previous analyses by including a review of management information provided by projects, interviews with stakeholders and, for the first time, insights from a series of action learning sets of union project managers. Previous evaluations have included insights from ULF projects managers and union officers but these were primarily drawn from surveys. The action learning set methodology allowed for deeper, more qualitative, insights of the challenges faced by union project managers, the lessons they have learnt in attempting to address them and the support offered by unionlearn to address common issues. Finally, following the approach adopted by the Marchmont Observatory, we have included an economic and fiscal impact assessment of the ULF for Round 16. Therefore, this study of the ULF has undertaken a comprehensive approach in trying to address the core evaluation questions.

It is important to note that the evaluation still has some limitations. The problem of accurately identifying available 'populations' remains: ideally, any evaluation would be able to draw down information on the full population of learners and employers (i.e. all of those learners and employers that have received support as a result of ULF funded activity), including contact details, from the ULF Central Database. This 'population' data could then be used as the basis for undertaking the surveys with samples of participants. But this was not possible limiting the scope for achieving a sample that accurately reflects all of the ULF projects according to their actual volume of activity.

Employer contacts were identified from multiple sources with a high degree of corroboration across sources. The evaluation team also had full control over the administration of the survey. This was not the case for the learner survey. Here, the evaluation team was reliant on support from individual unions, who identified and distributed the survey instrument. There is, therefore, no reliable means by which we

can accurately say just how many possible learners were approached to complete the survey. Some unions did not engage in this part of the evaluation. Nevertheless, these caveats aside, the analysis presented draws from wide ranging sets of data, with large sample sizes and, in the case of the employer survey, a relatively high response rate. The degree of triangulation of data, from many different sources, allows us to confidently generalise, in a thematic sense, about the activities of union learning.

9.3 Headline findings

The headline findings are very positive. ULF funding helps engage a large number of learners across a wide variety of learning opportunities. The ULF supports learning that is inclusive. It helps break down barriers to learning including negotiating time off, accessing learning resources and by building learner confidence. Union learning helps workers build their learning and work-related skills useful for current and future job-roles. The delivery of the ULF has become more cost effective and delivers significant returns on investment for learners, employers, the Treasury and unions. Many learners improve qualification levels and those with no prior or lower level of qualification are most likely to gain. Union learning contributes to a wide range of organisational benefits and perceived benefits appeared to have increased since 2010. Support structures (such as learning agreements and committees) and bargaining lead to better outcomes, but the proportion of employers report that investment in capacity building structures has declined since 2010. There are significant benefits to the economy and union learning also has positive benefits for unions. Key data supporting the overall findings are as follows:

Table 9.1: ULF Evaluation Rounds 15 and 16 - headline findings
Across Rounds 15 and 16 learners took part in over 533,000 learning episodes
Union learners have taken part in over 1.45 million learning episodes since 1998
Value for money of the ULF has improved with a unit cost per learning episode of £81 in 2016
The benefits of union learning are recognised by learners, employers and wider stakeholders. One in five learners (19%) achieved a higher level of qualification and over three-quarters of employers (77%) report they get a positive return on the investment that they make when supporting ULRs and union learning.
Four-fifths (80%) of learners felt that union learning had given them skills that were useful in their current job; and the same proportion agreed they had developed skills that could be transferred to a new job in the same industry (80%) or a new job in a different industry (78%).
One in five union learners report gaining a promotion or increased responsibility at work, 13 per cent report that they had stayed in a job that they might otherwise have lost, 7 per cent got a new job and 11 per cent received a pay rise.

Table 9.1 ULF Evaluation Rounds 15 and 16 - headline findings – cont'd
Over two-thirds (68%) of learners with no previous qualification and just under half (47%) of those starting with entry or Level 1 qualifications got a qualification at a higher level.
11 per cent of employers reported that employees were more likely to get a pay rise as a result of union learning. A third of employers (32%) report that organisational performance has increased as a result of union learning and nearly half (47%) that employee commitment has improved.
The economic impact assessment shows that in Round 16 union learning made an estimated net contribution to the wider economy of £1,452 million . For every £1 invested in the ULF there is a return to the economy of £12.30 .
Twenty per cent of learners taking part were not union members before they started, almost half (46.2%) of these became a union member. A third of all learners reported becoming more active in the union.

There are two further parts to this section. First, we consider the evaluation findings thematically in terms of the key success criteria that inform unionlearn's activity and the outcomes and impact of the ULF. Second, key recommendations are presented.

9.4 Conclusions – evaluation findings by theme

The evaluation objectives are to evaluate the extent to which ULF projects funded under Rounds 15 and 16 have met their stated objectives and the extent to which unionlearn has met objectives in supporting the administration and delivery of the ULF. The study has been designed to evaluate the overall impact of ULF activity, quantified where possible against a set of evaluation criteria (see below) and also to identify the key challenges and barriers that may impede delivery of ULF projects; to identify lessons learnt; to suggest practical measures to facilitate more robust longitudinal analysis of impact and to disseminate the key findings.

The success criteria for the evaluation are as follows: the scale and nature of activities and outcomes, accessibility, inclusion, employability, progression, capacity building, employer engagement, mainstreaming, productivity, organisational performance and skills utilisation, economic impact, impact on unions and sustainability. These findings are grouped under the following three headings: inputs, outcomes and impact. These are considered in turn below by outlining the assumptions and definition of the criteria and measures used, a summary of key data from the different strands of research and the conclusion in relation to each summarised under inputs, outcomes and impact.

Scale and nature of ULF activity –

What funding supports the ULF? What is the nature of ULF activity and how has this changed? Does union-led learning represent good value for money? The key data includes the funding allocated and type of learning activities reported.

Since 1998 the ULF has disbursed £180 million to unions to support learning and skills opportunities. This has resulted in learners participating in 1.45 million learning episodes. ULF projects in Rounds 15 (2012-2015) and 16 (2015-16) received £37.84 million and £11.16 million respectively. Between Rounds 15 and 16, the overall annual allocation reduced from £20.2 million in 2012/13 to £14 million in 2015/16, a fall of £6.2 million (30%). Unionlearn absorbed much of the funding reduction, scaling back activity by £4.4 million: the average reduction in funding to ULF projects was 15 per cent.

Across Rounds 15 and 16 learners took part in over 533,000 learning episodes. Value for money of these outputs has improved considerably with a unit cost per learning episode of £81 in 2016. The learning activity supported by the ULF covers a broad spectrum from higher education to vocational and non-vocational courses, apprenticeships, functional skills learning, GCSEs, CPD and other further education provision.

There has been an increased emphasis on the achievement of learning targets that more strongly reflect UK skills policy objectives. This includes the growth in targets for apprenticeships and functional skills learning and a relative decrease in the proportion of activity targeted at CPD and other FE based learning. The majority of performance targets set for ULF projects around the volume of learning activity were exceeded, in both Round 15 and Round 16. Exceptions included targets for ULR training and learning agreements, which potentially threaten ongoing sustainability.

For functional skills, performance against cumulative targets for Round 15 and 16 were exceeded by 27 per cent with a total of 45,437 functional skills learning episodes delivered. The increased focus of ULF targets on functional skills and apprenticeships is leading to disengagement by a small number of specialist and professional unions as the learning needs of workers and organisations in which they operate do not align with these targets.

The apprenticeship numbers recruited through the union route exceeded combined targets for Rounds 15 and 16 by 15 and supported 25,194 apprentices. Support for apprenticeship activity is located across a broad range of unions. While employer activity on apprenticeships appears to have increased, employer direct involvement with unions on developing apprenticeship programmes appears to have declined. National stakeholders suggest that unions have a key role to play in maintaining the quality of apprenticeship standards.

Accessibility of learning –

Does the ULF support learners to overcome barriers to learning and make education and training more accessible? What motivations and barriers to learning do union learners have? What do unions do to help overcome those barriers and support participation in learning?

Learners faced a range of barriers. More than half (51%) reported time as being a barrier to learning. This was the case even though a large majority (71%) of employers reported that they support union learning through in-kind contribution of employee time and provide staff time off for work-related training in learning agreements (86%). A significant minority (41%) of learners reported a lack of management interest and support as a barrier to their learning. The learner survey confirmed that ULR support (52%), information from union events (25%) and promotional materials (20%) were the key ways that learners become engaged in union learning activities.

A fifth also reported word of mouth from colleagues, illustrating the peer-to-peer nature of union learning engagement. Both information (93%) and more formal advice and guidance (49%) were key to learner engagement. Just under two-thirds of (62%) of employers reported that equality of access to learning by their employees had improved as a result of union learning.

Inclusion –

Does ULF activity help to engage disadvantaged learners and those more likely to be excluded from education and training systems? Key indicators focus on the demographic profile of union learners (gender, age, ethnicity, disability, occupation, job type, pay levels) and comparisons with the general population and the workforce in union organised workplaces.

Union learning notably engaged older workers and learners from minority ethnic groups, when compared to all employees in employment and those working in unionised workplaces. ULF activity engaged learners from across the occupational spectrum with a third in managerial or professional roles.

A fifth (22%) of union learners were in operative roles compared to six per cent of the general population of workers and five per cent of the unionised workforce. The proportion of union learners with no formal prior qualification was 12 per cent, more than twice the level of the general population (5%) and four times higher than the proportion of workers in unionised workplaces (3%).

Employability –

Does ULF help support learners improve future employability and enable them to navigate changes at work? Key indicators focus on learner motivations for taking part in union learning, the outcomes from union learning experiences and the development of skills and knowledge that is transferable to other roles.

Attaining transferable skills was the key motivator for taking part in union learning, closely followed by personal interests and, finally, gaining advantage in a current role. Four-fifths (80%) of respondents felt that union learning had given them skills that were useful in their current job; 80 per cent agreed they had developed skills that could be transferred to a new job within the same industry; 78 per cent agreed skills could be transferred to a new job in a different industry. Overall, union learners were more likely to acquire soft skills than hard skills.

Almost one in ten (9%) learners started an apprenticeship as a result of union learning. In terms of building employees' capabilities, two thirds of learners reported that they were able to do their job more effectively as a result of union learning. One in five had gained a promotion or increased responsibility at work, 13 per cent report that they had stayed in a job that they might otherwise have lost as a result of union learning, seven per cent got a new job and 11 per cent received a pay rise. The same proportion of employers reported that employees were more likely to get a pay rise as a result of union learning.

Progression –

Do learners progress within union learning and on to other education and training? The key measures focus on the levels of qualification at the point at which ULF learners start with union-led learning and qualification levels now. In addition, on how union learning leads to further participation in learning at work, in further or higher education or in the community.

Union learners gain qualifications at all levels. Just under a quarter (24%) gained qualifications at Level 3 or higher, just under half (47%) at Level 2, and just under a quarter (23%) at Entry or Level 1. One in five learners had achieved a level of qualification higher than that which they had before taking part in union learning. This proportion was higher for those with lower level or no qualifications. This was the case for just over two-thirds (68%) of learners with no prior qualification and for just under half (47%) of those with entry or Level 1 qualifications. The more episodes of union learning that a learner undertakes the better the outcomes, across a wide range of indicators. Notably, those that undertook multiple episodes of learning were more likely to gain promotion or get a pay rise than those that undertook a single episode of union learning. Qualification progression contributes to perceived gains in organisational performance, while the frequency of learning contributes to soft outcomes of learning and reported job satisfaction amongst learners.

Capacity Building -

How does ULF support building education and training capacity in workforce development at the workplace? What is unionlearn's role in supporting ULF activity? Key workplace indicators include the number of ULRs trained and Learning Centres Developed.

Those with a qualifications uplift and more episodes reported better outcomes. There were relatively better learning outcomes for people with disability, ESOL learners and the low paid. As part of their involvement with unions on learning, just over a third of employers (36%) reported they had set up a joint union-management learning centre and just under a third (32%) had developed an apprenticeship programme. This level of capacity building appeared to have declined, however, since the 2010 employer survey. Similarly, four in ten employers reported they had established a union learning committee and just under a half (48%) a learning agreement. Again, these levels were lower than those reported in the 2010 survey. There was, however, an increase in joint financing of learning arrangements. Training levels for new ULRs was lower than anticipated. Fewer employers also reported that they recognise ULRs at their workplace, with the numbers of ULRs per workplace declining between 2010 and 2015.

Employer engagement and workplace outcomes -

Does ULF activity engage employers in supporting the education and training of employees? Does ULF activity impact on employer training and workforce development? Key indicators are the number and type of employers engaged, the number of learning agreements newly developed or enhanced and the impact that employers report on their learning and development investment and practices.

The actual number of employers engaged through the ULF is not known as this data is not recorded systematically as part of ULF monitoring. The survey of 385 employers identifies that ULF engages organisations across a broad range of sectors. Employers confirm that unions contribute to raising the demand for learning, especially amongst those with little history of training. Employers report the benefits of the ULF to be significant across a range of factors. A majority of employers reported that, as a result of the ULF, increases were observable in: the take-up of job-related training; the take-up of non-job-related training; the number of employees attaining qualifications and equality of access to learning. Employers were more positive across these factors than in 2010. More than three quarters (78%) of employers reported being very supportive of the union learning role, with a similar proportion (77%) considering there to be a beneficial return for such investment. The overall added-value of union learning was considered to be significant. In terms of workplace outcomes, employers reported that as a result of union learning activity, some key areas of the organisation's performance had improved (increased or significantly increased). This included overall organisational performance (32%), health and safety improvements (32%) and employee commitment (47%).

In addition, industrial relations had also improved, with 44 per cent of employers reporting that levels of trust between the union and management had improved and 42 per cent that the bargaining with unions over training and learning had increased. Analysis indicates that a number of factors contribute to raising the impact of union learning on workplace outcomes, including support structures (such as learning agreements and committees), bargaining arrangements, employer investment in training in general and the extent to which employers value the ULF.

The number of new and enhanced learning agreements was lower than planned across Rounds 15 and 16. A total of 509 new learning agreements were reported and a further 84 updated or enhanced. This represents 61 per cent and 17 per cent of the planned totals for the two Rounds. Some national stakeholders were concerned about the potential impact of the introduction of the apprenticeship levy on the quality of provision and a potential reduction in focus on continued vocational education and training (CVET) for existing workers. National stakeholders' view unions as offering a unique, added value, on engagement with employers and employees and capacity to operate across levels (workplace, sector, national), offering learning brokerage through knowing what is needed at the workplace, in advocating for learners (and workplace needs) and in upholding training standards.

Mainstreaming -

Is union learning more 'mainstreamed' within the wider UK learning and skills system? Understanding of and engagement with union learning by wider stakeholders

Stakeholders' viewed unions as having a unique role to play in the skills systems, yet the understanding of unions in general and how union learning operates in practice remained low. The sharing of good practice across ULF projects was reported as quite low and could be improved. Union project officers note that the competitive system of bidding militates against this. As does project funding of a shorter duration. However, unions recognised they had more of a role to play with regard to sharing good practice between project and unions. The significant scaling back in the operational capacity of unionlearn also limits the capacity of union projects, and unionlearn itself, to mainstream activity more widely.

Productivity, organisational performance and skills use –

Does ULF activity support employees to be more skilled, productive, help improve organisational performance and skills utilisation? Key measures are that learners feel that they are better at their job as a result of union learning, that employers report that union learning leads to better organisational performance and skills utilisation.

A large majority of learners reported that union learning led to skills development of use in their current job (80%) and in everyday life (83%). Employers reported that union learning had contributed to a wide range of organisational outcomes. This was most likely with regard to: raising the demand for learning; improving the number of

employees attaining qualifications and raising equality of access to learning. Just under a third (32%) reported that organisational performance had increased as an outcome of union learning. While direct engagement with unions appeared to have decreased slightly, the perceived benefits, according to employers, that derived from union learning appeared to have increased.

Economic Impact

Key evaluation questions focus on value for money (noted above) and so called 'deadweight - the extent to which the participants in the ULF (learners and employers) would have undertaken the training and development activity anyway without the support of the ULF and union activity. These measures help inform the economic impact assessment model (further detail in Appendix 5).

There is compelling evidence that union learning contributes added value to learners, employers and the economy. A large proportion of union learners reported that they would not have undertaken learning without the support of their union. Just 17 per cent reported they would have done the learning anyway. Nearly three quarters (73%) agreed they would not have done the learning without the support of their union. And just under two thirds (63%) reported they were offered learning that was not supported by their employer.

Just under half of employers agreed (47%) that learning activities would not have taken place without external union funding. Likewise just half of employers reported they would consider similar activities without the support of the Union Learning Fund.

Overall the ULF contributes an additional £1,452 million to the economy. For every £1 invested in the ULF there is a return to the economy of £12.30 of which £7.60 accrues to the learner and £4.70 to the employer.

Impact on unions -

Does ULF activity have an impact on trade unions? The key indicators here are whether those learners that were non-members become members as a result of union learning and changes in perception of the union by members and non-members.

Four-fifths (80%) of learners were a union member before taking part, and this rose in aggregate by nine per cent after union learning. The proportion of non-union members that joined a union after learning was, therefore, substantial, with 46.2 per cent joining a union.

Across all learners, there was also evidence of increased activity in unions. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of those reporting an impact stated they were now more active in their union (this represents a third of all learners). For a third of those reporting an impact, engagement in union learning activity led to them taking up union rep roles including ULRs, steward and health and safety rep roles.

Sustainability of learning -

Is the activity supported by the ULF sustainable in the longer term? What is the likelihood of it continuing without ULF funding and what strategies and measures have been put into place to try and achieve this?

There seem strong economic grounds for sustainability, but the development of mechanisms through which union learning can be sustained in the workplace (notably ULRs embedded in workplace union teams and learning agreements with employers) appear to have declined.

9.4.1 Conclusion

ULF projects have helped engage a large number of learners across a wide variety of learning opportunities. The programme is more effectively managed as value for money has improved. The ULF supports learning that is inclusive engaging those less likely to have formal qualifications and from minority ethnic backgrounds. It helps break down barriers to learning including negotiating time off, access to learning resources and by building learner confidence through peer-to-peer support.

ULF supports skills acquisition for current and future employability and a fifth of learners improved qualification level. This rises to two-thirds of those with no prior qualifications gaining a qualification. Support structures (such as learning agreements and committees), bargaining arrangements and employer investment lead to better outcomes, but the proportion of employers reporting investment in these capacity building structures has declined since 2010. Some stakeholders recognise the unique role and value of unions and union learning, but knowledge of the detail of what unions do and achieve is limited.

Union learning contributes to a wide range of organisational benefits and the perceived benefits derived from union learning appeared to have increased since 2010. Just under half of employers agreed that learning activities would not have taken place without external union funding. There are significant benefits to the economy with every £1 invested in the ULF there is a return to the economy of £12.30. Union learning also has positive benefits for unions with almost half of those learners that are non-members joining a union.

9.5 Recommendations

The evaluation of Rounds 15 and 16 of the Union Learning Fund has highlighted significant benefits to learners, employers and the wider economy. **Given this, our central conclusion is that there is value in continuing funding for the ULF.** However, it is necessary to recognise the changing context within which this funding initiative is situated. It is evident that this is impacting on the ability of unions to deliver projects and the strategies that they employ to meet key targets. Clearly the funding settlement for the ULF has become more challenging. This is the case not only in terms of the total resource allocated to the ULF, with annual funding levels now 30 per cent lower than three years' ago. It is also the case that the basis for funding has become more competitive and the overall policy approach to funding initiatives is now based more on demonstrating results, additionality and value for money. This is not going to change.

One response to this context has been for unionlearn to accommodate as much of the decline in resource as possible, in order to safeguard frontline project resource (which in terms of direct funding to union projects is now only 15 per cent less than three years' ago). But one consequence of this has been the loss of previous support structure for the delivery of certain aspects of ULF projects, particularly at a regional level. The annual allocation of bids also means that projects prioritise short term goals to the detriment of longer term goals (such as the training and development of ULRs and signing learning agreements). Building expertise and workplace structures helps ensure sustainability and impacts that are supported beyond the life-span of individual projects. This adds greater value to the investment in the ULF in the longer term. In the light of these findings the key recommendations are as follows:

(1) Review the annual funding settlement – One year projects have a limiting effect on the wider efficacy of ULF projects. While unions are able to focus efforts on achieving lower level courses and functional skills, successful approaches to continuing professional development and the attainment of higher level qualifications require a longer-time frame. It is also the case that the more episodes of learning that are undertaken the more beneficial the outcomes to learners and the performance of organisations. Significantly, shorter projects focus the attentions of project workers more towards the drafting of bids and project compliance, and less towards innovation, relationship building with employers and providers, and testing out new and effective strategies for hard to reach groups. Potentially, in other words, shorter time-scales for projects threatens the unique selling point of the ULF.

(2) Balance key policy imperatives – Even though ULF projects exceeded target against key areas on functional skills and apprenticeships, a relative increased in focus on these skills targets is delimiting, leading in some cases, to professional unions pulling away from the ULF, as there is a perceived lower emphasis on CPD and the attainment of wider professional skills. Yet, it is recognised by wider stakeholders that unions have a unique role to play in attracting learning in all contexts, in way that employers may not be able to do. While the emphasis on functional skills and apprenticeships is likely to remain, ULF bids should be encouraged from a wide range of aspirations and contexts specific to different unions and staff associations. Engaging this broad range of unions, learners and employers is a key feature of the ULF and underpins a core principle of learning for all.

(3) Improve and integrate project monitoring and reporting and evaluation – The degree of reporting for ULF projects, according to ULF project managers, has increased considerably. The frequency and content of reports has increased. However, there is less of an emphasis on the evaluation of success, outcomes and impact. On the one hand, the level of data has increased, yet there remain considerable gaps in data. First, there seem to be different sources of data collection and reporting and the UCD functionality is under-utilised. Second, the evaluative capacity of collected data remains weak. The data on learners and employers that are collected are limited, for example. Unionlearn is currently looking to address this through the introduction of a tracking system of learners. This is potentially promising. However, the success of any new software platform will depend on something of a change in the approach that unions take to understanding the need for data and evaluation more generally, not least in terms of who owns such data. Appendix 6 sets out detailed recommendations for developing an evaluation framework that will help provide guidance and structure to all those involved in monitoring and evaluation processes. Three key areas need to be strengthened in order to realise this.

- Firstly, evaluation needs to be scripted into ULF projects. This should be detailed in bids and costed appropriately. There is a prior example of this with the Union Modernisation Fund. This would allow all projects to undertake their own evaluation of project success. Such evaluation could then be reviewed independently as part of a ‘light touch’ external evaluation.
- Secondly, more thought needs to be given to the data needed for an independent, external evaluation (undertaken within the scope of the evaluation framework – see appendix 6). The lack of a core dataset has been a problem that has bedeviled all evaluations of the ULF. Conducting sound, random sampling of learners for survey evaluation remains virtually impossible. A new tracking system being developed by unionlearn will allow for the recording of individual learner information. For this to have value for an independent external evaluation, this data (including data on employer organisations) needs to be available and deposited via a central data repository. Big data centres now allow for data storage and analysis that ensures confidentiality through the encryption of data.
- Thirdly, a working group of unions, unionlearn, DfE and stakeholder partners should work jointly to agree this framework.

(4) Enhance the sharing of intelligence and good practice across ULF projects – While the reporting of data has increased, the sharing of intelligence and best practice has not. Instead, projects report increased competition between unions due to changes in the bidding structure. This seems to be self-defeating in a context of reduced resourcing. Much can be gained (and costs potentially saved) in terms of synergies by the sharing of challenges, good practice and lessons learnt across projects. Formal networks across projects should be established at the outset of each funding round, with the expectation of networking activity by project managers. The balance of resource needed by unionlearn to help facilitate this needs to be reviewed.

(5) Review the balance between output delivery and sustainability of learning activity

– While the policy emphasis on key learner outcomes is understandable, the ability of unions to successfully pursue union learning requires wider activity to take place. Learners typically find out about union learning via ULRs, yet the levels of training for ULRs, and their numbers, are declining. Workplace structures, such as learning centres, committees and agreements, often help to ensure that meaningful dialogue and engagement takes place with employers and learning providers and can contribute positively to the impact of union learning at the workplace level. Yet, such structures seem to have declined. Part of the reason lies in the changes to the funding structure, direction and emphasis. Increased emphasis is needed on rebuilding ULR training and networks and engaging more widely with employers. This requires the wider support of individual unions, unionlearn and employer bodies. Such activity should be encouraged by DfE. The unionlearn team and Board need to continue to develop dialogue across the union movement and with wider stakeholders including providers, government and employer bodies on the best way for unionlearn to support this activity.

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