



Higher Education at Work consultation

TUC response to the higher level skills strategy

Introduction

1.1 The TUC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's higher level skills strategy, as set out in the *Higher Education at Work* consultation document. The TUC is the voice of Britain at work and represents 6.5 million employees in 58 affiliated trade unions.

1.2 The TUC is supportive of efforts to increase higher level skills within the current and future workforces. The TUC welcomes the targets for the number of working adults qualified to level 4 and above by 2014 and the principle of more employees accessing higher level skills in the workplace. This will require, however, a greater degree of employer investment in higher level skills.

1.3 Furthermore, higher level skills should not be viewed in isolation from the broader strategy to increase skill levels. The TUC agrees with the diagnosis that the wide disparities in the educational achievement of the UK adult population compare badly with that of our competitors. Despite the fact that a relatively high proportion of adults have high-level qualifications, there is a very large group with few or no qualifications. There is also a large inequality in the distribution of training opportunities: managers get three times as many training days as non-managers, and particular groups of workers are also less likely to be offered training – older staff, part-time workers, and certain black and minority ethnic groups¹.

1.4 A key issue for the TUC is to ensure that progression routes are available so that individuals who make the effort to gain qualifications at Level 3 are then able to access training for higher level skills. Trade unions play a crucial role in supporting employees to take-up training opportunities. However, the provision of learning opportunities in the first instance is itself positively associated with the presence of a recognised trade union. The TUC has consistently argued in favour of building a more inclusive approach to learning and skills underpinned by social partnership arrangements, which would address the importance of strengthening both employer and employee demand. This would apply to broad-based employability skills as much as to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and higher level skills.

Collective bargaining

2.1 Collective-bargaining over training would provide an incentive in terms of stimulating demand for high levels skills. There is clearly a strong role for trade unions in encouraging take up of high level learning opportunities by employees and in negotiating with employers to allow access to learning. Research based on an analysis of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey found that there were higher levels of negotiation and consultation over training were reported in workplaces where union learning representatives (ULRs) were

¹ *The Learning Curve*, TUC, January 2006

recognised². Workplaces that had union recognition and structures for trade union representation reported higher levels of training than those that did not. The extent to which some training had taken place for the largest occupational group was 14 per cent more likely in workplaces with union recognition and one or more trade union representatives. Between 1998 and 2004, the reported levels of negotiation over training increased threefold, according to management respondents to the WERS 2004 survey. They reported negotiating with union representatives about the training of employees in 9.2 per cent of cases, compared to 3.3 per cent of cases in 1998.

2.2 In workplaces with union recognition, employees are 8.1 per cent more likely to report receiving training. Where a workplace has ULRs, union recognition and a representative structure that includes employee representatives, employees are 14.9 per cent more likely to report receiving training. Where unions are recognised and negotiate over training, employees are 23.9 per cent more likely to report having received some training. Conversely, where a trade union is not recognised, 22.87 per cent of management respondents reported that no time had been spent on training, compared to just 5.86 per cent with their union recognised counterparts. The right to collectively-bargain over training is, therefore, an important incentive to stimulating employer demand for higher level skills. Although the Leitch report refrained from supporting the call for some form of statutory underpinning for workplace learning arrangements, it did concur that initiatives such as Learning Agreements and Workplace Learning Committees were helpful in supporting the union role, especially by giving greater strategic direction to the role of ULRs.

The right to request time off for training

3.1 The TUC welcomed the recent announcement by the Government that it would be introducing a new legal right for employees in England to request time to train from their employer and that this would be modelled on the existing right to request flexible working. The fact that the new right will be open to all employees regardless of their existing skill level also means that it offers the opportunity for individual employees, with the support of ULRs, to make the case for greater access to higher level skills and continuing professional development.

3.2 Given that the latest evaluation of the programme has highlighted that ‘there is little strong evidence to suggest that Train to Gain is successfully targeting employers who have not trained recently’³, the TUC is of the view that the Government should build on its previous commitment to support unions to play a key role in Train to Gain. The Leitch Review implementation plan published last year gave a commitment that trade unions, in particular through the role of

² *Training, union recognition and collective bargaining: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*, unionlearn research paper 4, Mark Stuart and Andrew Robinson, Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change, University of Leeds, June 2007

³ *Train to Gain Employer Evaluation: sweep 1 research report*, LSC, May 2008

ULRs, would be encouraged to work with employers to draw up action plans for delivering the Skills Pledge and to help more employers and employees to access Train to Gain provision⁴.

3.3 It is crucial that the skills framework is translated into reality by ensuring that employees and trade unions have a significant voice in the new institutional skills framework. For example, the social partnership arrangements which underpin the institutional skills infrastructure in other leading European economies, such as France and Germany, continue to perform better than the UK on workforce skills.

3.4 As the TUC highlighted in its response to Leitch, the regional dimension to the implementation of the Government's skills strategy is crucial. Unions play an important role in the work of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Ensuring the continued input of trade unions alongside employers will be essential within the reforms envisaged within the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration.

Equivalent or lower level qualifications

4.1 The TUC is concerned at the decision by Government to withdraw funding from higher education students who are studying for a qualification which is equivalent to, or at a lower level than, their existing higher education qualification (ELQ). While the TUC would support the principle that employers should pay, where appropriate, there are considerable difficulties in applying that principle in relation to ELQs since it is unclear whether many students would be able to seek support from their employer. For example, only 17 percent of Open University students currently receive any financial help from their employer. The effect of this policy is that an employee with a first degree will not be subsidised to undertake training in core skills which may be a requirement for career development or entry into certain professions. More than two-fifths of part-time students already have some form of higher education qualification. Many may be studying in order to achieve an employment or career change, rather than to enhance their skills with their current employer. As a result of this decision as many as one in five part-time students in England will no longer receive funding, compared to only two per cent of full-time students.

Employer demand for higher level skills

5.1 The TUC welcomes efforts to increase employer investment in higher level skills. The TUC notes that, as part of its strategy of employer engagement, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), is supporting the creation of learning provision co-funded by employers. This is in line with Government targets of creating 5,000 full-time equivalent places for the 2008-09 academic year. HEFCE is also developing a more flexible funding method for co-funded provision in order to achieve the more challenging target of 20,000

⁴ *World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*, DIUS, 2007

co-funded higher education places by 2010-11⁵. The TUC welcomes the fact that HEFCE has exempted employer co-funded provision and foundation degrees from the decision regarding ELQs. The TUC also supports the principle of greater employer engagement. However, the higher education sector in the UK has already shown itself to be sensitive to shifts in demand for students. The TUC would be wary of shifting incentives too far in favour of perceived employer demand at the expense of satisfying the demand of students.

5.2 As the *National Employer Skills Survey* has consistently shown, skills gaps are far more likely to occur in those occupations traditionally described as unskilled or semi-skilled, as opposed to more highly skilled occupational areas, such as managers, professionals and associate professionals⁶. Moreover, although the overall number of skills gaps reported is in decline, the broad pattern of occupational distribution of the skills gaps remains very similar to that recorded in previous years. In other words, the progress that appears to have been made in increasing the skills of the workforce has not necessarily impacted on those occupations for which need is the greatest.

5.3 An example of a higher education qualification designed with the intention of stimulating demand from employers and students is the Foundation Degree. Enrolments for Foundation Degrees began in September 2001, following a high degree of employer-involvement. The number of students on Foundation Degree courses has grown from 2,530 full-time and 1,795 part-time students in 2001-02, to 40,820 full-time students and 31,095 part-time students in 2007-2008. However, in only five percent of cases do employers meet the tuition fee costs of full-time Foundation Degree students and in only 22 percent of cases do employers meet the costs of part-time students.⁷ There is, therefore, room for a greater employer contribution, especially given that funding is a large barrier for many part-time students.

Employee demand for higher level skills

6.1 It is clear that demand exists within the workforce for higher level learning. According to research carried by the TUC in association with the Open University, most union members were ready to undertake higher education⁸. More than 40 percent had a Level 3 qualification and nearly 30 percent were already educated to at least first degree level. Only 14 percent of union members felt that they had completed their educational development. Moreover, 41 percent were already engaged in further education, training and development. In addition, more than two thirds of union members were planning to undertake

⁵ *HEFEC strategic plan 2006-11*, HEFCE, updated May 2008

⁶ *National Employers Skills Survey 2007*, LSC, May 2008

⁷ *Foundation degrees: Key statistics 2001-02 to 2007-08*, HEFCE, May 2008

⁸ *Learning unlimited: A survey of union members and higher education opportunities*, unionlearn, November 2007

such learning in the next 12 months, while 71 percent were hoping to undertake such opportunities in the next five years and a further 31 percent in the next 10 years.

6.2 Employees recognise the importance of learning. Almost all union members surveyed, some 96 percent, either agreed or strongly agreed that it was important to be continually learning and developing their knowledge. A similar proportion, 91 percent of union members surveyed, felt they would always keep on learning to make sure that their knowledge and skills were up to date. The reasons given for wanting to take up learning were diverse, with a higher proportion, more than four out of five, wanting to study for their personal development or leisure, compared to just over half who felt that gaining educational qualifications would benefit them in their employment.

6.3 However, despite strong demand for learning, union members often feel that there are barriers to accessing courses. Employer support is crucial in taking up courses. Nearly three out of five union members felt that accessing paid time off work to study would be a problem, while more than four out of five agreed that a determining factor was getting paid time off to study, with 38 percent agreeing strongly with this. In this context, the new right to request time off for studying is extremely welcome.

6.4 The financial costs of studying are also seen as a disincentive, though. Just under half felt that they could not afford the fees. This is understandable given that 30 per cent earned less than £20,000. Almost three quarters felt that they would be interested in learning if the employer paid all or part of the course fees. In addition, over a quarter stated that they had too many domestic and personal responsibilities to think about studying again.

6.5 Building up the collective role of union learning reps would also go some way to addressing the need to tie skills initiatives in the workplace with other aspects of working life, in particular productive employment relations. Research by a number of influential academics, including Ewart Keep, has highlighted the inter-relationship between skills deficiencies and organisational deficiencies and that strategies to tackle the former cannot be undertaken in isolation from the latter. In addition, the TUC believes that the Government's skills strategy needs to be linked to an active national industrial strategy that supports and directs the work undertaken by RDAs. The importance of these relationships for ensuring that any improvement in skills has a significant impact on productivity in the coming years has been persuasively set out by Ewart Keep and colleagues, who argue that "this gap in public policy is liable to prove costly, and to minimize the productive impact that publicly funded upskilling initiatives can have."⁹

⁹Keep, E, Mayhew, K, and Payne, J (2006) 'From Skills Revolution to Productivity Miracle: not as easy as it sounds?', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol.22, no.4

Higher education and unionlearn

8.1 To help spread the positive benefits of the union impact upon training, the TUC has launched unionlearn, which offers guidance on training for employers and employees, with courses ranging from literacy and numeracy through to higher level learning. Unionlearn also provides and coordinate training for union reps and officers.

8.2 Through unionlearn, unions are developing their learning activities, notably with support for workplace union learning reps and help to ensure that there is an increasing range of high quality learning opportunities to meet the growing demand for union learning.

8.3 Unionlearn has been working with organisations at a regional level to improve links between unions and the higher education sector. In the South West, for example, this has involved developing 'Beyond Level 2' resources and support for ULRs in relation to progression opportunities for union learners. In the North West, unionlearn is working with Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) to develop employer-based training accreditation programmes. In the North West, South West and Northern regions, the unionlearn teams are working closely with the higher level skills pathfinder projects.

8.4 Unionlearn has drafted a strategic position paper setting out its aims and objectives for the next five years. Unionlearn has also developed memoranda of understanding between unionlearn and the Open University (OU) and between unionlearn and FDF. The memorandum of understanding with the OU involves a special arrangement between the two organisations which means that union learners can claim a 10 percent discount on fees for OU first year undergraduate courses that carry 30 and 60 points towards their qualification. Unionlearn is also working with FDF to raise the knowledge and awareness of ULRs about Foundation Degrees, routes into Foundation Degrees, including progression from apprenticeships and support with research and dissemination of good practice.

Union learning clubs

9.1 A national project supported with funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has brought together unionlearn, Aimhigher, the OU and Birkbeck College to work on the development of tools, partnership approaches and pathways for union members to access higher education. This involves promoting short courses in the workplace, financial support for learners and the setting up of union learning clubs. Union learning clubs bring workplace learners together to share information about courses, encourage each other and if the learners want this, to receive guidance from a university tutor on the skills that help them to succeed in higher education. The *Trade Unions Aimhigher* national project has developed resources now available nationally for ULRs to advise and signpost learners to higher level learning. This includes the higher education theme within the unionlearn Climbing Frame and ULR Higher Education training module. The project involved three unions, PCS, Prospect and UNISON, and the OU and Birkbeck College, working with ULRs

and employers to support workers to access higher education, some 70 percent of whom were taking part in higher education for the first time. Further examples of unions supporting higher level learning can be found in Appendix One at the end of this document.

Leading by example in the public sector

10.1 The TUC believes that an important lever in the attempt to engage employers in the accreditation of in-house training will be to ensure that public sector employers follow this approach. However, the experience of some affiliated trade unions is that this is not necessarily the case in all parts of the Civil Service, for example. Some unions have been disappointed by indications that some public sector employers have not felt it necessary to undertake external accreditation of their own professional training. The TUC believes that establishing accreditation of in-house training provided by Government for its own staff is necessary to lend credibility to the call for other employers to undertake this as well.

Building links between higher education and business

11.1 The TUC believes that public policy should support ways of enabling knowledge acquisition in a way which reduces transaction costs. A common criticism from both academics and the business community is that there is a lack of knowledge of both business contacts and of how to access the relevant academic expertise. Mapping key areas of expertise at regional level would help to reduce the barriers to collaboration. A similar approach at sectoral level would also have the potential to deliver greater higher education links with business, but this would need to be accompanied by a much more robust form of social partnership than simply obliging Sector Skills Councils to have at least one union Board member.

11.2 However, the most important contribution of the higher education sector to industry is through the knowledge it makes available in publications, lectures and seminars. The challenge for Government is to ensure that businesses are able to assimilate this body of knowledge. This involves businesses developing much stronger cultures of innovation, both among managers and the workforce more generally. Innovation is not simply about new technology, but also about creative working practices. The employee input into these processes can help to make them more effective. While some companies are very keen to engage with ideas from their employees, others seem opposed to this approach. Yet evidence from the United States shows that attempts to improve productivity through workforce involvement are far more effective in unionised businesses. Black and Lynch analysed data from the Educational Quality of the Workforce National Employer Survey and found that 'employee voice' arrangements had a larger positive effect in unionised establishments¹⁰. In the UK, the presence of a

¹⁰ 'What's Driving the New Economy: the benefits of workplace innovation', Black and Lynch, NBER working paper 7479, 1999.

recognised trade union is also positively associated with policies that contribute to high performance workplaces, according to recent evidence from *Managing to Change*, which confirms the positive productivity gains available¹¹.

Employer influence over course content and design

12.1 While welcoming attempts to create a more demand-led system, the TUC would be cautious about extending the scope for direct employer influence over course content, design and teaching. While higher education links with business can bring significant economic benefits, it is important to understand the nature of those linkages. A useful typology, developed by the Local Innovation Systems Project at MIT, groups higher education contributions to business under four idealized headings:

- ‘Indigenous creation’, that is the creation of entirely new industries based on the research and skills generated by local higher education institutions.
- Curriculum development in response to the transplantation of industries from elsewhere, for instance into areas where traditional industries have been in decline.
- Helping to redeploy the core technologies of declining industries into new technologically-related industries.
- Upgrading existing industries through consulting and contract-research alongside activities designed to upgrade the skills of the workforce.

12.2 Under all of these headings, universities have a variety of contributions: education and training; adding to the stock of codified knowledge; increasing the local capacity for scientific and technological problem-solving; and “providing space for open-ended conversations about industry development pathways and new technological and market opportunities.”¹²

12.3 In both the United States and the UK, employers report engagement with universities using a very wide range of mechanisms. Informal contacts are most frequently cited, followed by graduate recruitment, use of publications and attending conferences. Licensing and patenting are among the least frequently cited of interactions which contribute to innovative activity. However, with only a few exceptions, UK firms more frequently report such interactions. In fact, there “is little evidence to suggest that the frequency of interaction is below par in the UK and that particular policy attention is required to increase it”.¹³ The

¹¹ *Managing to Change*, chapter 10, Management versus regulation? ESRC *Future of Work* programme

¹² *Universities, Innovation, and the Competitiveness of Local Economies: summary report from the local innovation project – phase I*, Richard K. Lester, MIT Industrial Performance Centre, December 2005

¹³ *University-Industry Linkages and UK Science and Innovation Policy*, Alan Hughes, Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge, Working Paper No. 326 June 2006

TUC would, therefore, urge caution in moves towards direct employer involvement in course content and design.

Supporting choices

13.1 Choices and opportunities made during teenage years have important implications for job opportunities, future career paths, earning potential and quality of life. As outlined by the Equal Opportunities Commission in its general Formal Investigation into Apprenticeships, education is crucial to the achievement of equality between men and women¹⁴. While it is true that the way young people see themselves and their role in society is developed from an early age, the choices that are made by teenagers have a significant impact on their future. The TUC, therefore, believes that it is critical to challenge stereotyped assumptions among this age group and those working with them. Innovative solutions are required to address these issues, and there is much work to be done. The TUC believes this should be addressed both in terms of access to work placements, guidance, and subject choices.

Learning about work

14.1 Work experience often provides incredibly valuable opportunities to thousands of young people each year, through school organised work placements and placements during school holidays. Many students enjoy their work experience placements and are able to develop a good relationship with their supervisor. There are also benefits for employers in terms of developing positive relationships with local education providers, identifying potential future recruits and in relation to the wider social responsibility agenda.

14.2 However, providing enjoyable and enriching work experience demands a committed approach and the TUC believes that the Government should explore the possibility of developing a national work experience charter mark, available to employers who agree to sign up to a number of commitments in relation to work experience. These commitments should cover several areas including the provision of stimulating and challenging tasks, health and safety and effective monitoring of the student's achievement in the workplace. More importantly, systemising the process would allow more effective monitoring and challenging of stereotyping within work placements. This system could only work with active involvement and determination from employers, schools and trade unions.

14.3 Outside speakers in the classroom can also make a big impression on young people. In particular, trade unionists in the classroom can use their extensive knowledge of real-life examples to bring employment issues alive. They can also help young people to understand about pay and collective-bargaining, employment law, health and safety issues and about the importance of equal opportunities. This presents a valuable opportunity for unions and

¹⁴ *Plugging Britain's Skills Gap: challenging gender segregation in training and work Report of phase one of the EOC's investigation into gender segregation and Modern Apprenticeships*, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2004

employers to promote a message about the importance of constructive employment relations in the classroom. Those employers and unions who do work together to release speakers from work and provide training and support should be recognised by Government through some form of best practice award.

Information, advice and guidance

15.1 In addition to ensuring non-traditional work placements, gender stereotyping should also be addressed directly through high quality, objective advice and guidance. Young people should be made aware of the various options that are available to them, taking account of their interests and abilities. This needs to be an explicit element of recommendations around advice and guidance. The personal careers interview should be with a teacher or careers adviser who has been trained to open up choices, challenge gender stereotyping and promote non-traditional work opportunities. As well as challenging gender stereotyping, advice and guidance needs to be charged with the explicit goal of raising and helping young people meet their aspirations regardless of race, ethnicity, disability or sexuality.

15.2 The TUC would also point out that high quality information, advice and guidance should be made available to adults as well as young people considering higher education. A third of respondents in TUC research have cited a lack of understanding or clarity on how taking up higher education would improve their job or career prospects. In part, this reflects a lack of support from their employers or managers to access learning. A quarter also felt that they lacked the study skills to take up higher education¹⁵.

Helping universities to offer access to the workplace

16.1 The TUC supports the aim of providing greater access to the workplace for all students. A significant influence is geographical proximity. Most work placements, for example, tend to be located proximate to the relevant higher education institution. A key factor is the strength of the relationship between employers and university departments. Aside from issues associated with residential preference, or course requirements that students live locally, a major influence is the contacts base of the institution arranging the placement. Research suggests that a lack of contacts is a significant restriction on the ability of academics to develop the necessary links with business. Involving trade unions would provide universities with more opportunities to identify potential work placements, using union networks of employers with whom they have recognition.

16.2 Quality work experience should ensure that students are able to identify potential learning outcomes; that universities, students and employers are able to set clear objectives for the placement; proper workplace supervision takes place alongside regular academic monitoring, and feedback is given. The latter should

¹⁵ *Learning unlimited: A survey of union members and higher education opportunities*, unionlearn, November 2007

include voice mechanisms including the election of work placement representatives, alongside course reps or union reps, to articulate the experience of work placement students. In unionised workplaces, there would even be scope for a mentoring scheme involving union reps to support students on work placements.

Encouraging STEM participation among young people

17.1 The TUC believes that a key to encouraging non-traditional groups to participate in STEM education is best addressed by supporting teachers in the delivery of those subjects. According to the Royal Society, the Government has consistently missed its targets for recruitment into initial teacher training courses in science and mathematics¹⁶. The Royal Society recommends that higher education institutions that offer secondary PGCE courses and which have strong reputations in science should be encouraged to offer PGCE courses in the separate sciences or in other ways support the training and development of teachers in these subjects.

17.2 However, the high levels of debt facing many graduates, together with the lack of affordable housing, inevitably have an impact on the career choices of many people contemplating entry into the teaching profession. The key to attracting people into science teaching differs little from the ways to attract teachers in other subjects. Teachers wish to be properly rewarded and respected. To be successful at increasing the uptake of STEM subjects, teachers need the space to be creative.

Challenging stereotypes

18.1 As the TUC outlined in its recent strategy paper on improving participation in science, the media portrayal of science and scientists often presents a narrow illustration of what a career in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) involves¹⁷. Classic stereotypes of science depict it as requiring ‘masculine’ attributes, leading to women working in the field sometimes being portrayed as extraordinary or exceptional¹⁸. Moreover, students from families with a more advanced socio-economic background are more likely to show a general interest in science, and those with a more advanced socio-economic background are also more likely to identify how science may be useful to them in the future.

18.2 STEM education must, therefore, be structured in such a way that the pressure of grades and league tables do not undermine efforts to make science

¹⁶ ‘The UK’s science and mathematics teaching workforce: A “state of the nation” report’, the Royal Society, 2007

¹⁷ *Hybrid Cars and Shooting Stars*, TUC, April 2008

¹⁸ ‘Role Models in the Media: an exploration of the views and experiences of women in Science, Engineering and Technology’, Jenny Kitzinger, Joan Haran, Mwenya Chimba and Tammy Boyce, Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (2008)

interesting and enjoyable. The study of science should be seen as something which a wider range of pupils can achieve through a creative, exploratory approach. The TUC believes that DCFS should meet with DIUS and teachers unions to examine the school day and the school week from first principles, discussing with professionals how best to structure school work in order to deliver maximum value for pupils in a way that also stimulates and rewards teachers.

18.3 In *Hybrid Cars and Shooting Stars*, the TUC also proposed the creation of a Science Clubs for Girls (SC4G) scheme, modelled on the successful Computer Clubs for Girls (CC4G) initiative that is run by e-skills UK, the Sector Skills Council for IT and Telecoms. The TUC would support science clubs targeted at 10 to 14 year old girls and run voluntarily by schools as an out of hours activity. CC4G, launched in England in June 2005 (and in Scotland in March 2006), is already benefiting more than 120,000 girls in over 3,450 schools. The clubs capture girls' imaginations at an age when they typically become disinterested in IT. The clubs are now involved in over 58 per cent of state funded secondary schools and 17 per cent of all state funded primary schools. The introduction of such science clubs should take place in dialogue with teaching unions, so that capacity issues can be addressed.

Increasing STEM skills in the existing workforce

19.1 Adult Apprenticeships in science may be a way to address part of the gender divide in science, as research evidence from the Equal Opportunities Commission demonstrated that older women are more likely to embark on 'non-traditional' career paths. An Apprenticeships model could be a mechanism for graduates to gain practical workplace experience. Science Apprenticeships could also be an important pathway for people to gain entry into science by embarking on, for example, level 3 Apprenticeships in science with the possibility of progressing to level 4 and beyond, including pathways to university. A similar approach could be considered as with engineering, where there are comparatively good progression pathways from Apprenticeships to university.

19.2 The ongoing professional development needs of workers in science also need to be properly taken into account. The very nature of science means that it is continually evolving and the skills needs of workers in the sector must therefore also continually evolve. The Government has established Sector Skills Councils as a key vehicle for addressing the ongoing skills needs of different industry sectors. In practice, science cuts across the work of many different Sector Skills Councils. However the specialised nature of science means that often, the skills needs of workers in science are not properly represented by the current configuration of Sector Skills Councils. The TUC believes that there would be a benefit in having a more coordinated approach to the cross-cutting issues of science. The newly established Commission for Employment and Skills will be undertaking a process of re-licencing Sector Skills Councils. The TUC believes that through this process, the CES should carefully consider how the needs of science are best taken into account.

Appendix One: Extract from *Trade Unions Aim Higher*

Higher level learning for trade union members: case studies of recent learners¹⁹

20.1 The following examples illustrate the different ways in which unions can help learners access higher education through:

- Helping to build confidence to study at higher education level
- The Open University 10 percent discount for union learners
- Using higher education to help with promotion to a new job
- Helping to make higher learning affordable
- a workplace union learning club
- Exploring new ways of learning
- Developing management skills
- Taster courses that lead to further learning paid for by the employer
- A path to post-graduate study.

Building confidence to study

21.1 Julie Martin-Molyneux is a UNITE member who works in the tax department at Lloyds TSB processing tax applications and resolving customer tax queries. She has been in her current job for the last two years and has worked for the company for 23 years. Julie left school at 16 with 7 O-levels. Since then she has not taken any other formal qualifications, although has completed in-house job-related training courses and attends college in her own time to study Spanish.

21.2 The ULR at Julie's workplace recommended an OU course. She was given a prospectus from the OU with information about available courses and she called the OU helpline which was very helpful in addressing her concerns. Julie chose to study 'Understanding human nutrition' as this was a subject she was fascinated in. She received 50 percent funding for the course through the Trade Unions Aimhigher Project. Without this subsidy she feels that she would not have started. "Back then, I wasn't entirely sure I was going to be intelligent enough to do it but I was so interested in it".

¹⁹ *Trade Unions Aim Higher*, unionlearn, June 2008

21.3 The course was on-line and textbook based with an end of course assessment. She found the workload manageable and was able to balance it with her other commitments. She had support from her ULR and the on-line forums with other students on her course.

21.4 She really enjoyed the course, she comments “[it was] brilliant and I loved it...it was such a fascinating subject which has effected the life of my family and made me so much more aware of healthy living”. She has now completed and has already chosen the next course ‘Molecules, Medicines and Drugs: A chemical story’. She adds, “I can’t wait for the books to arrive! My ULR has been so moved by my enthusiasm that she has also signed up for a short course.”

Progression from Level 3 to higher education

22.1 NAPO is the trade union and professional association for family court and probation staff. The main focus of NAPO’s learning and skills strategy is to negotiate access to quality learning opportunities and NAPO ULRs help to ensure that all staff can access learning opportunities.

22.2 Briony Marder from the NAPO ULR network in Devon and Cornwall Probation Area (DCPA) assisted one member, Lianna Copleston, to take advantage of the OU 10 percent discount offer on courses for union members and her first steps into higher education. Lianna works as a Case Administrator in Plymouth. She left school after completing her GCSEs and gained an NVQ Level 3 in Business Administration via the Modern Apprenticeship programme a couple of years ago.

22.3 She enrolled on the OU Level One Social Science course. This was a year long part-time course, which she has just successfully completed. She chose the course because it included a mix of subjects, including crime – the subject she enjoyed the most, given the link to her work in the Probation Service. Lianna commented “I enjoy working for DCPA and would like to add a qualification to the valuable knowledge I have acquired as an Administrator. I would like to progress my career further within the service and hope that by taking up the opportunity of studying with the OU that I can achieve this goal”. She added “I wanted to learn with the OU as I could study around work, it was really simple to arrange it all – they made everything really easy”.

22.4 The course was a mix of distance learning supported by a number of tutorials that were based in Plymouth. She added “it was a real help to get to know others on the course”. Although she was new to higher education she was able to cope with the demands of the course. She notes “Although it was a struggle at first because some activities asked me to reflect on my life experiences and I am only 20! But apart from that it was fine, the OU were really helpful and gave me good feedback on any areas that I needed to work on.”

22.5 Lianna say she will continue with more higher learning but not straight away as she feels the timing is not right at the moment. But she adds, “the fact that I have got the Year 1 credits and can pick it up again as and when I am ready is great”.

Higher level skills underpin promotion to a new job

23.1 Rebecca Waters is a clerical officer in the courts service. Since joining the service, Rebecca has completed an NVQ level 3 in business administration and she was recently promoted to a supervisory post. Because of this promotion at work, Rebecca wanted to develop a better understanding of the supervisor's role and the skills needed for the job. She and her line manager discussed how to find a suitable course which would give her an introduction to management.

23.2 Rebecca's PCS ULR provided information about options available via the Open University short course programme. Rebecca researched the information provided by her ULR to find out more and whether it was right for her. She investigated the OU website (www.open.ac.uk/union) to find out how learning with the Open University works. Rebecca took this information and discussed it further with the ULR and line manager. Both agreed that the content of the course was relevant and, given that the learning was work related, her employer agreed to pay half of the cost of the course.

23.3 The course Rebecca decided on was "Understanding management" which takes a maximum of 20 weeks part-time. The course has four themes: different experiences of management, organisations, self-management and planning personal development related to work. There are no entry requirements, as OU short courses are designed for students who have not studied the theme before or who may have studied it a long time ago. This course awards 10 credit points that can be counted towards a degree. Learners can study at their own pace, although the OU recommends that learners on a 10 point course should allocate between 6 and 8 hours per week for their study. Rebecca felt that the course was right for her as it gave an introduction to management and explored core management ideas. This allowed her to know about basic management concepts and she is planning to take further study in supervisory management.

Helping to make higher learning affordable

24.1 Janet Goodier is an administration worker in the education sector. She left formal education with a Level 4 teaching certificate more than 25 years ago. She notes, "I am 49 and I have another 15 years work in me. I never want to stop learning." She adds, "I have wanted to do OU courses for a while. I got the prospectuses a couple of years ago, but the costs were too much for me."

24.2 Janet found out about the OU short courses and the discount available for union learners from a unionlearn project worker who attended a workplace meeting of her union, UNISON. Janet took the "Start Writing Fiction" short course. The discount offered to union learners meant that she was able to take part.

24.3 Janet notes, "I had to be really disciplined and make time for my study and it took me a while to get used to on-line learning. I was completely new to it. After a while I got the idea and the comments from others were really great. The tutor was really helpful and guided us through."

24.4 Janet passed the course and has completed another with the OU: Start Writing Poetry. She notes, “I did not really believe that I could do it ... so I am really pleased with myself that I came through. The Poetry course was a lot of fun and it has really helped develop my confidence to get feedback from others about my work”. In the long term she would like to work towards a degree. She will get credit for her previous learning and the two OU short courses that she has recently taken will also count towards her long term goal of getting a degree.

Exploring new ways of learning

25.1 PCS has been working with the Open University in the North West to promote the offer of short introductory courses to workers in the DWP. Nicola Whiteley is a Civil Servant at the Child Support Agency (CSA). She has a degree in Business Administration and since joining the CSA, has attended job-related training organised through work. Nicola has a keen personal interest in digital photography and had been considering doing a course in it for some time, but had always been put off due to the costs involved. She first heard about the courses on offer at an open afternoon held by PCS where she was provided with course information and the support available from the OU and ULRs. She signed up for digital photography which she found to be a simple and straightforward process.

25.2 Nicola was very positive about the course “it went really well and was easy to follow”. In particular, she found the instructions provided by the Open University were straightforward and fully comprehensive. The course was practically based and this was her first experience of distance learning. Having now completed and passed the course, she plans to do further courses in digital photography. Nicola was willing to speak about her experiences and gave an account of her learning journey at the Trade Unions Aimhigher Dissemination Conference in November 2007 to an audience of over 200 people. She also took the opportunity to take some digital photos at the conference that she could use as part of her course work.

Developing Management Skills

26.1 Prospect union has been working with the OU and unionlearn to promote the offer of short courses to workers in two BNG sites in the North West; Sellafield and Risley. The Sellafield site has over 10,000 employees alone and there are 50 union learning reps active there who support learners in a wide range of learning activities and support the running of a large workplace learning centre that has supported over 1,000 employees to date. Risley is a research facility and a large proportion of the staff there already have higher level qualifications. However, the ULRs were also keen to promote the OU offer at this site too.

26.2 Steve Hill left school after ‘A’ Levels to take up a job in the labs at Sellafield where he has worked for over 20 years and has worked his way to become a business improvement manager. He comments, “I have had plenty of

on-the-job training and I have lots of hands on experience, but I felt the need to get some theoretical understanding of management”.

26.3 He adds, “I was thinking about undertaking a degree-level qualification or a professional qualification. This was when my union Prospect came in. My union learning rep Val Marshall spoke to me about the opportunity to undertake an Openings or Short course with the Open University”. Val explained the variety of courses that were available, Steve comments “I thought to myself that this was an opportunity to dip my toe in the water. So I decided on the Introduction to Management short course. I’ve now just completed it and have gained ten credits. It was both useful to my work and to my own personal development. The OU support was really helpful, especially the telephone tutorials”.

26.4 Steve really enjoyed his time on the course, so much so that he is now planning to take up business studies with the OU. In addition, since Steve started his OU course, he has also become a ULR and is involved in promoting the lifelong learning message to others in his workplace.

A path to further learning sponsored by the employer

27.1 Michelle Nuttall is a Safety Assessor at Risley where she has worked for the past seven years. Michelle has attended a number of work-related training courses but has done no formal training or qualifications since her HNC at college. She found out about the OU courses available through her ULR who recommended that she apply. She then spoke to the OU advisory team who provided her with an information pack and further details about the courses available and study with the OU.

27.2 Michelle chose to study ‘Planets: an introduction’ as it was a subject she was interested in. She received 50 percent subsidy from the union – “I wasn’t entirely sure about doing the course but the fact it was 50 percent funded meant I was less hesitant about taking it up”. She really enjoyed the course and found it really interesting. “It was difficult to find the time to do all the study but it was manageable. There was a personal tutor available for additional support.” Michelle successfully completed this course and has already started another OU course. This time her course has been fully paid for by her employer.

A path to post-graduate study

28.1 Tim Boland is a Prospect member and a Process Engineer. He has a Masters degree in Chemical Engineering and Environmental Technology. At work he has attended informal job-related training courses mainly linked to safety and legislation. Having seen an advert posted in a union bulletin, Tim attended a workplace meeting with ULRs and the OU where the OU representative spoke about courses available and what is generally expected of learners taking the course.

28.2 Tim chose to study ‘Drugs, Molecules and Chemicals’ as he has always had an interest in this subject. He really enjoyed the course “there was good use

of different learning materials”. He liked the fact he could download extracts from the textbook using Adobe onto his computer which meant he could do some work easily during his lunch hour. Given his background in chemistry, he found the course was quite easy and has since gone on to study ‘Fossils’. He also plans to study ‘Life in the Oceans’ in the future, both of which are run through the OU.

28.3 In the longer term, he wants to focus on improving his maths skills and is considering a Postgraduate degree in maths. Interestingly, Tim’s involvement in the OU course has encouraged his girlfriend, who had dropped out of university some years ago, to go back to finish her degree with the OU. Tim has attended a couple of Union Learning Club meetings in his workplace where he has spoken to the OU tutor about helping his girlfriend onto the right course.

Conclusions

29.1 These case studies demonstrate the importance of taking the learning offer to the workplace, helping people know more about what is out there for them and offering support to help them if needed.

29.2 The successes so far show the need for further work between unions, the higher education sector and employers so that even more working people can take up higher level learning opportunities, this includes:

- Implementing the unionlearn strategy for higher level learning to develop higher level learning activity with a wide range of unions, ULRs and higher education organisations.
- Further roll-out of resources for unions and ULRs like the unionlearn Climbing Frame and higher education module for ULRs to help signpost working people to higher level learning.
- Maximising the potential of the Government’s skills initiatives (such as Train to Gain and Skills Accounts) to give further support to employees wishing to engage in higher level learning.
- Developing a range of pathways into and through higher education for union learners
- Embedding higher level learning within unionlearn and union structures so that it complements other union learning services.
- Learning more about the progression made by union learners and the ways that unions and ULRs can best support this.

Trades Union Congress
Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS

www.tuc.org.uk

contact:
Raj Jethwa
020 7467 1245
rjethwa@tuc.org.uk