

# **Trade Union Promotion Of Workplace Learning and Lifelong Learning in the UK**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This short presentation considers some lessons and views which may help inform the debate in Europe and elsewhere, regarding the development of relations between different social partners, the democratisation of education and the potentials of lifelong and workplace learning to empower citizens to reach their full potentials, whether at work or in their civic communities. In other words: how Lifelong and Workplace Learning helps to promote Self-Sustaining People, Organisations and Communities.

## **HISTORICAL NATIONAL RESPONSES – A Comparison**

Significant changes in economic, political and legal circumstances after the Second World War have greatly altered the role of trade unions in West European countries. Changing political, social and economic climates have also had a bearing on a series of relationships, particularly in terms of: the nature and character of industrial relations, the work force and their representation by trade unions and the bargaining relations between unions and management.

In the UK, one of the most significant changes has been the development of Trade Union involvement in negotiating workers' access to Lifelong Learning within a framework of Social Partnership. These developments are both exciting and significant, but they are, not yet, as wide spread as they might be.

The UK literature emphasises the varying contexts in which these developments take place, through, for example, differing constitutional and legal contexts, underwriting human rights and the range of powers that governments and other bodies can exercise. These have an important impact on the nature and direction of the relationships between parties, in response to priorities and desired changes.

To illustrate the different national responses to these developments Brown and King (1988) contrasted the situation in Britain and Sweden in industrial relations in the 1980s:

“Their [Sweden] strategy is one of security and cooperation in meeting economic crisis and structural changes within the framework of an egalitarian wage policy, extensive workers' rights including the right to work, and a comprehensive social benefit system. In Britain, the stress is on insecurity and confrontation within the context of increasing inequality, reduced protection and rights, a high level of unemployment and decreasing social benefits”.

## ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, SOCIAL CLIMATES

Taking the UK situation as an example it could be suggested that industrial relations in the broadest sense have changed significantly in the last 50 years or so and indeed are still changing. One such change could be described as the development of overtly cooperative relationships at the workplace, often generically termed 'partnership'. In recent years this term has been used to describe an array of relationships between a diverse range of actors and organisations (Martinez et al 2002; Guest and Peccei, 2001; Bacon and Storey, 2000).

The above issues are raised (and explored) in general by a new language of partnership and more specifically by the concepts of 'Social Partnership', 'Coopetition', and 'Lifelong Learning'.

## SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE UK

An examination of the emergence of the new European Union language of Social Partnership shows that the concept itself travels without much explanation. Yet we have the language of Social Partnership being used not only in Europe but globally between all kinds of organisations. There seems to be no accepted theoretical refinement of the concept of Social Partnership as applied to industrial relations in the UK. Yet the process of Social Partnership has been fruitfully used in several European countries including Sweden, Germany and Ireland.

### Can there be such a thing as Coopetition?

The author's interest and motivations in this field arose out of his involvement in the Trade Union Movement and Lifelong Learning initiatives for workers in the UK. In 1993 the author was invited to give a keynote speech on: '***The role of UK Trade Unions in developing Education and Training Social Partnerships***' to the European Commission's Employment Week Conference held in Brussels.

After his main conference Key Note presentation he conducted a seminar to address '***the concepts of cooperation and competition within the framework of Education and Training Social Partnerships***'. While addressing these issues in the seminar the author posed the rhetorical question: '***Can there be such a thing as Coopetition?***'

During the seminar the author went on to define '***Coopetition***' as:

"A state of relations whereby; traditionally competing individuals or organisations join together in social partnerships to pursue specific Co-operative ventures to achieve a common aim".

An important question therefore is 'Is there a new political and economic reality emerging which can be described as or understood by the concept of, 'Coopetition' or is it just market collusion hiding behind a socially acceptable jargon?'

We live in a new era of socio-economic Globalisation and rapid 'Informing, Communicating and Enabling Technologies' (ICET) innovations. Adjusting to on-going change and being an active part of the process of change is a major challenge for the Trade Union Movement. Managing and mastering such on-going changes would be an important Lifelong Learning objective significantly affecting Trade Unions, Employers and Industrial Relations.

The term 'Social Partners' has been defined by the UK *Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers* (USDAW, 1998) as:

"Social Partners means employers and unions co-operating together to improve working conditions and to give employees a greater say in how their company is run".

A review of the current literature and the authors personal experience working with Social Partnerships in the UK seem to suggest that there is a lack of theoretical refinement of the concept, types, interpretations and applications of Social Partnerships and little analysis of their composition and objectives.

Most commentators agree that many recent Management -Trade Union Partnerships, (the economic partners) centre on a shift away from an adversarial relationship towards more mutually co-operative and harmonious relationship, usually with the aim of improving organisational performance and competitiveness.

In light of the above brief observations it is obvious that the process of negotiation between employees (their representative organisations), employers and the government (the tripartite partners) has been and most probably will remain a crucial part of industrial relations. Such ongoing negotiations create challenges and potential solutions for the actors involved in this process. For the author the challenge is to understand the complex intricacies of industrial relations with the help of recent ideas of Social Partnership and Coopetition, and the role of Lifelong Learning in this context.

To date, however, there is a poverty of systematic studies, firstly to understand the nature and process of such negotiations and then to assess if the model (Social Partnership) has developed a more democratic approach to bargaining relations and a more democratic involvement for workers in education and training in the UK.

It is the author's view that the role of trade unions in bargaining within the West European capitalist economy must be examined, if we are to understand the evolving model of Social Partnership, Coopetition and the impact of Lifelong Learning on this model.

## **LEARNING TO BE – OR NOT TO BE?**

Industrial Relations, like other human relations, comprise ongoing understanding of the changes and subsequent negotiations between the participants in the industrial processes. Hence Lifelong Learning seems to be an essential part for exploring, understanding and strengthening the industrial partnership process. In the 1970s it was fashionable to talk about "Lifelong Education" and "Lifelong Learning", an idea and a concept mooted by the document "**Learning to Be**" - a report produced by UNESCO's International Commission (1972), which amongst other things, recommended '*that lifelong education be made the master concept for education policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries*'. With the emergence of the knowledge era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the concept is now being revisited with a view to applying it in new circumstances and contexts in the present age of Globalisation.

## **UK LABOUR GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES**

Since 1997, the Labour Government in the UK has signed up to the 'Social Chapter' of the European Union 'Maastricht Treaty' to bring the UK unions into the process of national industrial redevelopment (Thompson, 2002). This followed articulation by the new Labour Government, of a number of education and training strategies intended to promote Lifelong Learning. These policies were initiated with a view to promoting social inclusion and regenerating communities. In this context Lifelong Learning was designed to contribute to economic and active welfare policies.

### **Some Limitations of the UK Government Strategy**

A great deal of work has been done in the UK to design and deliver employee 'product related workplace skills'. However, there seems to be a lack of rigorous academic research in certain aspects of teaching, learning and training in UK. In addition there is little in the literature regarding the democratising, building and enhancement of workplace relationships and workplace learning. And finally there has been little analysis of the interplay between these important factors or their impact in civic society in the wider sense.

This paper has been produced with a view to highlighting some lessons from the UK experience of Lifelong and Workplace Learning – to encourage the development of transferable outcomes and to identify some pertinent questions for the future:

- To help us to increase our understanding as to whether the interplay between Social Partnership, Coopetition and Lifelong Learning undermines or underpins workforce development and social cohesion?
- To explore whether social, economic and political partners can collaborate and work in concert to enhance their respective positions against market and democratic forces? If so, can this state of relations be sustained?
- To understand the Lifelong Learning processes and delineate their objectives, with reference to 'A model of Social Partnership and Coopetition' as applied in industrial relations.
- To examine the role of UK Trade Unions in promoting Lifelong Learning in the UK Workplace.

## **WILLIAM BEVERIDGE - Education for leisure, happiness and self-fulfilment**

Paul Mackney, Associate Director (Further Education) of the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) recalled a quote from William Beveridge a British economist and social reformer, closely associated with the development of the welfare state in the UK. Mackney, when looking at future policy on lifelong learning stated that:<sup>1</sup>

Education for leisure, happiness and self-fulfilment still has as important a role to play in the twenty-first century as it did when Beveridge wrote in 1944 that:

‘Learning and life must be kept together throughout life; democracies will not be well-governed till that is done. Later study should be open to all, and money, teaching and opportunities must be found for that as well.’

If the nineteenth century was about the development of public elementary education, and the twentieth about the development of public secondary education, we need to debate how the twenty-first century will usher in a new era of mass further and higher education, with lifelong learning as a basic human right.”

## **EARLY UK DEVELOPMENTS – 1960s and 1970s**

It was not until the 1970s that training and employment schemes of the kind we know today in the UK were first introduced. In the two decades which followed the Second World War unemployment never exceeded 3 per cent and was generally below 2 per cent. Manpower policies were developed in the 1960s to deal with regional imbalances and with skill shortages in particular sectors. For example, the “Regional Employment Premium”, a labour subsidy paid to manufacturers for each worker they employed in “Development Areas”, was introduced in 1967. The “Industrial Training Boards” (which have since been replaced by Sector Skills Councils<sup>2</sup>) with powers to levy employers and make grants to those who provided training of an approved standard, were established under the *Industrial Training Act 1964*.

### **Some Notable Exceptions**

However, Lifelong Learning and Workplace Learning were not considered major parts of the strategy during this period. One exception was the Open University, an idea which was developed by the Labour Government during the 1960s and which began accepting applications from students in 1970. And another, being that the Trade Unions have also shown a consistent interest in education and training for their members for almost the previous 150 years in the UK.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.niace.org.uk/Publications/periodicals/AdultsLearning/BackIss/Oct07Comm.htm>

<sup>2</sup> For more information see Volume I, Part I, Section A, of Research Paper (RP 05/61) HMSO.

## SHORT CASE STUDY – An Historical Perspective

### Preamble - The Thatcher Government and Industrial Change

During the rule of the Thatcher Government in 1987, a Manchester Company which produced corn flour was taken over by an Italian Agri-business. The factory management informed the several recognised site trade unions\* (TUs) that it intended to de-recognise all but one union and impose a 'A Single Union Deal' on the site.\*\*

This unilateral imposition of certain bargaining relations was encouraged by the 'Neo-liberal' Thatcher government. The Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), the largest of the site unions was informed that it was, in future, to be the only recognised union for bargaining on site.

The TGWU was not prepared to comply with this proposal and suggested 'round-table bargaining', where the joint unions bargain together with the employer in one set of negotiations. The TGWU proposal was finally accepted by the Company, if for no other reason than to avoid the unions taking industrial action to protect their bargaining rights.

To prepare for the first set of annual 'round table negotiations' the TGWU proposed to take the Joint Shop Stewards Committee off-site to Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT), a local further education college, to train the Union Stewards in how to research, develop, produce and negotiate a 'Joint Union Wage Claim'. The Company agreed to this proposal.

### EU ACTION PROGRAMMES

During the week-long training course at MANCAT the food company 'Joint Shop Stewards' group discussed leaflets publicising the up-coming EU Commissions 'Action Programmes' which included the 'FORCE Programme'.

The FORCE Programme was the smallest of the EU Action Programmes and was designed to promote Social Partnerships through out the European Union, which would produce vocational training materials and which would seek to harmonise such vocational training across certain industrial sectors in EU member states.

The European concept of Social Partnership (SP) encourages combinations of, for example; Trade Unions, Employers/private organisations, Further and Higher Education, Local or National Government and Non-statutory Voluntary Sector Stakeholders to come together in partnerships which could bid for funding through the EU Action Programmes. And in the case of the FORCE Programme it encouraged such Social Partnerships to develop and produce Vocational Education and Training materials which would be common across the European Union (EU).

\* Including the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and Manufacturing Science and Finance Union (MSF).

\*\* The Author of this paper was the TGWU's Regional Full -Time Official with responsibility for the TGWU members employed at the above mentioned Manchester Corn-flour Company in 1987.

## THE UK FORCE FOOD SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP (UK-FFSP) - CASE STUDY

### UK-FFSP - A past and future model\*

In 1988 the TGWU group initially connected with the food manufacturer's site in Manchester, mentioned above, brought together a social partnership not surprisingly called the 'UK FORCE Food Social Partnership'. The UK-FFSP in 1989 included Trade Unions and Employers from the UK Food industry, the Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT), and some Local Government Authorities.

In 1989 the UK-FFSP was the first Social Partnership in the UK to make a successful application to the EU Force Programme for funds to develop food industry Vocational Education Training (VET) modules. The UK-FFSP then in 1990 established an EU wide network of similar Social Partnership groups across other member states, to join and participate in the UK - led FORCE Food SP, to make it a genuinely pan EU initiative with the aim of harmonising food industry training across the EU.

Subsequently the TGWU brought the Union Shop Stewards (later to be called the Trade Union Partners), from the partner food companies, together at the MANCAT College, Trade Union Education Department to start work on, the UK contribution, to the development of the Food Industry Training Materials.

It soon became apparent that whilst the Stewards had practical on the job work skills and experience, they had little or no writing or training materials development skills. Consequently the TU Partners invited the professional tutors from the Trade Union Education Department to join the UK-FFSP and train the Shop Stewards how to write and develop the training materials. At this point it became clear that it would also be sensible to include the partner companies professional Training Managers in the UK-FFSP. This action brought positive and quite unforeseen developments as the project progressed.

The first action of the 'Union Training Stewards', as they were now being called, was to carry out a workforce 'Training Needs Analysis' in their respective workplaces. The second action was to produce the training-materials (four modules in all). The third and most innovative action was to train the Training Stewards to deliver the vocational training in their own workplaces in conjunction with the company's professional Training Managers.

The actions, arising out of this social partnership approach to workplace relations, addressed:

- The revitalisation of union member's interest, action and democracy within the workplace trade union branches.
- Establishing the prototype Shop Steward/Union Training Stewards, anticipating the modern development of Trade Union Learning Representatives (ULRs). By 2009 there were more than 20,000 Union Approved, 'Union Learning Reps' in UK industry, functioning with legal status.
- Establishing study circles for informal and formal learning, anticipating what Dr Etienne Wenger has in more recent times described as 'Communities of Practice'.
- The identification and accreditation of prior experience.
- Reducing worker alienation, generating more workers understanding of the companies aims.
- The promotion of increased productivity.
- Workers taking their new gained confidence and experience into their civic communities.

Another unexpected development was where the trade union partners found themselves acting in a 'brokering' role bringing industry and Further Education together. This was clearly perceived as a very innovative and positive development by all partners and has, in all probability, contributed to the growing establishment and development of 'Workplace Learning Centres' in UK Companies.

\* The Author was the Initiator/Founder of the UK-FFSP

## UK GOVERNMENT LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY SINCE 1997

The concept of Lifelong Learning was increasingly popular in the mid 1990s, but the current Labour Government's strategy dates from the publication in 1998 of the Green Paper, '*The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain*'<sup>3</sup>. That paper set out the Government's vision to build a new culture of learning and its proposals for supporting lifelong learning. It highlighted the importance of Lifelong Learning as a key strategy for ensuring the future prosperity of the UK; stressed the importance of a partnership approach to Lifelong Learning and the need to develop a culture of learning to help build a united society<sup>4</sup>.

In the 2003 White Paper '*21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Realising Our Potential*' the UK Government states its commitment to Lifelong Learning. Chapter 4 of the paper is devoted to skills for individuals:

Others pursue learning for its own sake. They have enrolled in evening classes and extramural courses, with no intention of getting qualifications, but to broaden their horizons, expand their knowledge, and gain enjoyment from studying with others. There must continue to be a broad range of opportunities for those who get pleasure and personal fulfilment from learning. A civilised society should provide opportunities to enable everyone, including those who have retired, to learn for its own sake.

The range of lifelong learning opportunities still varies enormously across the country and priorities for public funds vary. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is now responsible for planning and funding the full range of this work, including programmes provided by Colleges, Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations. So for the first time, we have an opportunity to develop a consistent, coherent pattern of lifelong learning opportunities in each area across the country<sup>5</sup>.

However the focus of the White Paper was on improving basic skills. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), whilst welcoming the White Paper, was concerned that the personal development aspects of learning may be overlooked in favour of basic skills. This issue has been raised in a parliamentary question on 'Recreational Adult Education' by Joan Walley MP and answered by Ivan Lewis MP, the then Minister for Education and Skills:

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the implications of the decision to prioritise some groups of adult learners in recreational adult education.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** There has been no decision to prioritise some groups of learners in recreational adult education. We gave a commitment in the Skills Strategy White Paper to safeguard the availability of lifelong learning courses by agreeing with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) an overall indicative budget for non qualification provision provided through local education authorities (LEAs), family and neighbourhood learning. This we have done. The figure for 2004–05 is £207.4 million compared with £206 million in 2003–04. This follows a period when the Government significantly increased the budget for this type of learning from £145 million in 2000–01, and £183 million in 2002–03. In November 2002, 662,000 adults were on predominantly non vocational and non qualification courses run through LEAs<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Cm 3790, February 1998, pp 9-15-enclosed

<sup>4</sup> Blunkett launches individual learning revolution, DfEE PN 25.2.98

<sup>5</sup> *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Realising Our Potential*. July 2003, Cmd 5810 page 68 paragraph 4.40-4.41 available online at [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/pdfs/whitePaper\\_PDFID7.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/pdfs/whitePaper_PDFID7.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> HC Deb 11 March 2004 c 1737

Notwithstanding the Governments statement in the 2003 White Paper quoted above, its critics claim that it's more recent policy on Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQs) which targets support for those without qualifications has had the opposite effect from the stated aim by limiting the opportunities for the very group the White Paper identifies as needing support:

A civilised society should provide opportunities to enable everyone, including those who have retired, to learn for its own sake.

NIACE also launched an **Independent Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning**. Chaired by Sir David Watson, the Inquiry was launched in September 2007 and will report in September 2009.<sup>7</sup> The overall goal of the Inquiry is to offer **an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK**. This will involve:

- Articulating a broad rationale for public and private investment in lifelong learning;
- A re-appraisal of the social and cultural value attached to it by policy-makers and the public;
- Developing new perspectives on policy and practice.

**The Leitch Report** published in December 2006<sup>8</sup> sets out the current framework and activity to improve skills in the UK. It describes the contributions to the UK's skills profile made by employers, individuals and the Government. **It is significant that there is little or no mention of Trade Unions in the Leitch Report**. It has been reported that UK employers invest a significant amount in training.

The Leitch Review was commissioned by the Government to identify the UK's optimal skills mix in 2020 to maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice and to consider the policy implications of achieving the required level of change. The Leitch Review reported its conclusions and recommendations to the Government in 2006. The Review considered:

- That the UK Skills and Training System will be Employer Led
- the skills profile that the UK should aim to achieve in 2020 in order to drive growth, productivity and support social justice over the longer term;
- the appropriate balance of responsibility between Government, employers and individuals for the action required to meet this level of change; and
- The policy framework required to support this.

However, Professor Ewart Keep (2004) as early as 2004 wrote:

In the past decade employers, market and private sector influences have had a marked impact on Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy... It is argued that largely unfettered de-regulation practices have gifted employers a 'voice without accountability' that has shifted regulation and responsibility for VET onto the State and education and away from the workplace... (Oxford Review of Education Vol. 30, No. 1, March 2004)

More recent research by Keep (Unpublished) appears to indicate that employer financial contribution and commitment to the Governments strategy may be short of what is expected or required. Keep anticipates a growth in Government finance to cover the employer shortfall.

In addition, other commentators indicate that training activity is most likely to be focused on the most highly - qualified employees and, unsurprisingly, tends to provide employees with skills that are specific to their current jobs rather than more transferable skills. Overall, highly-qualified adults are most likely to participate in learning. Those least likely to take part are more likely to face multiple barriers to participation.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/AboutIFLL.htm>

<sup>8</sup> [Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills](#), Leitch Review of Skills, December 2006

## KEY ASPECTS OF UK GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

### Train to Gain

The main UK government programme for improving workplace learning is the **National Employer Training Programme** (NETP), known as **Train to Gain** (T2G). This was developed from the **Employer Training Pilots** (ETPs) scheme. National roll-out of the programme began in August 2006. The programme includes a "core offer" to employers willing to give their employees paid time off to train; of free training for their employees who lack basic skills and/or a first full level 2 qualification (and in some cases level 3).<sup>9</sup>

The programme is offered through an independent and impartial brokerage service acting on behalf of employers. Beyond the core of free training up to Level 2, brokers provide support to design and source a comprehensive training package to meet employers' wider needs. In certain areas, assistance at level 3 is also being trialled.<sup>10</sup>

The Government recently announced the further of expansion of T2G (most notably the programme's expansion to include Level 3 training nationally) with funding rising from £460 million in 2007/08 to £657 million in 2008/09 and exceeding £1 billion by 2010/11.<sup>11</sup> And in the November 2008 Pre-Budget Report the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced an even greater investment in T2G as part of the Governments response to the current Global Finance Crisis.

### Right to request training

In addition, the Education and Skills Bill 2009 included provisions to give employees the entitlement to request training. A consultation was launched in June 2008. In the consultation paper, Secretary of State John Denham said:<sup>12</sup>

We believe that introducing a new right to request time to train – effectively giving most employees in England a right to a serious conversation with their employer about their skills development – would help encourage and support adults to develop their skills and realise their potential. It would go with the grain of what the best employers are already doing. And, by helping to raise their employees' awareness and aspirations in relation to skills, it would support and encourage all employers – in both the public and private sectors – to invest in the skills of their employees as a driver of future business performance.

### Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have long been an important form of workplace training in the UK. Apprenticeships offer a combination of on-the-job training with the chance to gain qualifications. However, the numbers in apprenticeships had dwindled from an estimated 367,000 in 1979 to 174,000 by 1996.<sup>13</sup>

Modern Apprenticeships were introduced in 1994. In May 2004, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Charles Clarke, announced a series of reforms.<sup>14</sup> The changes included the introduction of Young Apprenticeships for 14-16 year olds, making Apprenticeships available to people aged over 25 and renaming Foundation Modern Apprenticeships and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships as Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships respectively.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) took over responsibility for Workplace Based Learning for Young People in England from Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) on 26 March 2001.

<sup>9</sup> A level 2 qualification refers to any qualification equivalent in standard and breadth to 5 GCSEs at A\*-C or a National Vocational Qualification at level 2. Level 3 is equivalent to two A levels or NVQ Level 3.

<sup>10</sup> See LSC, *Our Statement of Priorities*, November 2007 for details of these trials.

<sup>11</sup> LSC, *Our Statement of Priorities*, November 2007, p50

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/documents/TimeToTrain.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm199900/cmhansrd/vo001110/text/01110w09.html\\_sbhd3;http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written\\_answers/1993/jun/14/apprentices](http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm199900/cmhansrd/vo001110/text/01110w09.html_sbhd3;http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1993/jun/14/apprentices)

<sup>14</sup> DfES Press Notice, *New Apprenticeships will widen opportunity and boost business* – Clarke, 10 May 2004

Numbers in apprenticeships have increased. In 2006/07 there were 239,000 people participating in either basic or Advanced Apprenticeships – this compares with 75,000 in 1997.<sup>15</sup> The target is for 400,000 apprenticeships by 2010/11.

### **The UK Governments Union Learning Fund**

Trade unions are an important part of the government's skills strategy. The 2003 Skills Strategy said:

Raising productivity through investment in skills benefits both employers and employees. Done in the right way, it will lead to greater organisational success and more rewarding jobs. So there is a strong common interest for employers and employees to collaborate in promoting skills, training and qualifications. We want to encourage employers and unions to work together in deciding how best to raise skills. We will jointly encourage this through the DTI Partnership Fund and the DfES Union Learning Fund. Currently the Partnership and Union Learning Funds overlap in providing support for activity in workplaces to support skills development and partnership, so we shall consider how best to align them. Trade unions should demonstrate their commitment to training and lifelong learning by providing relevant accredited training for their Union Learning Representatives, supporting and guiding their Learning Representatives, and working in partnership with employers to help develop a workplace culture and to tackle low skills. Investors in People UK are also working with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to extend Investors in People through the union route.

We have ensured trade union representation on the boards of the public bodies involved in training, such as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). We are committed to trade union involvement in the new Skills for Business Network, because the sector agenda for skills and productivity concerns employees just as much as employers. We will ensure that there is union representation on their boards as each new Sector Skills Council comes into operation, and will expect union involvement in Councils' subsequent work to develop sector skills agreements.

The TUC and trade unions have a vital role in encouraging individuals back into learning through help and support in the workplace. Our recent legislation to give statutory rights to Union Learning Representatives will ensure that this network can play an increasingly influential part. The network has shown that it is effective at reaching out to the lowest skilled and most disadvantaged groups in the workplace, and finding opportunities for them to develop their skills. Adults with low skills often wish to avoid drawing attention to their skill gaps, and do not wish to approach an Employer or Learning Provider to seek help. The role of Union Learning Representatives has been expanded both through legislation (which came into force in April 2003), and by funding for the Union Learning Fund (which is to rise from £11 million in 2003/04 to £14 million in the next two years). These changes mean there will be more Union Learning Representatives, with more time to carry out their duties, and supported by improved products and services for promoting learning.<sup>16</sup>

Since the 1980s, UK Trade Union engagement with Lifelong and Workplace Learning has significantly grown. This growing engagement has increased member involvement and has resulted in a significant re-vitalisation of Union organisation and activity at workplaces; particularly where Union engagement with Lifelong Learning projects has taken place. This has enabled Union members to pursue their Unions aims of pursuing social justice and creating active citizens in the workplace and in civic society. UK Trade Unions do not in the main formally train their members for civic positions but it is historically correct to say that Trade Union Education has given union members skills that have enabled them to take up civic positions such as elected Local Government Councillors and School Governors with confidence. Some UK Trade Unions are starting to develop courses in 'Active Citizenship' encouraging members to take their Workplace Lifelong Learning experience actively into their local communities.

Background information on Union Learning Representatives is available from the TUC website.<sup>17</sup> The 2009/10 prospectus for funding from the ULF is also published online.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See [standard note SN/EP/3052](#) for more on apprenticeships

<sup>16</sup> DfES, DTI, HM Treasury, DWP, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Cm 5810 July 2003. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/>

### **ILO Convention on Paid Educational Leave**

The ILO in 1974 established a convention on Paid Educational Leave (PEL) for workers. In 1975 the UK Government ratified this ILO Convention. Sadly, it has to be said that UK Trade Unions are still leading the campaign to see the UK implement the convention in full.

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<sup>18</sup><http://www.unionlearningfund.org.uk/files/seealsodocs/24328/ULF%20prospectus%2012%20single%20pages%20combined.pdf>

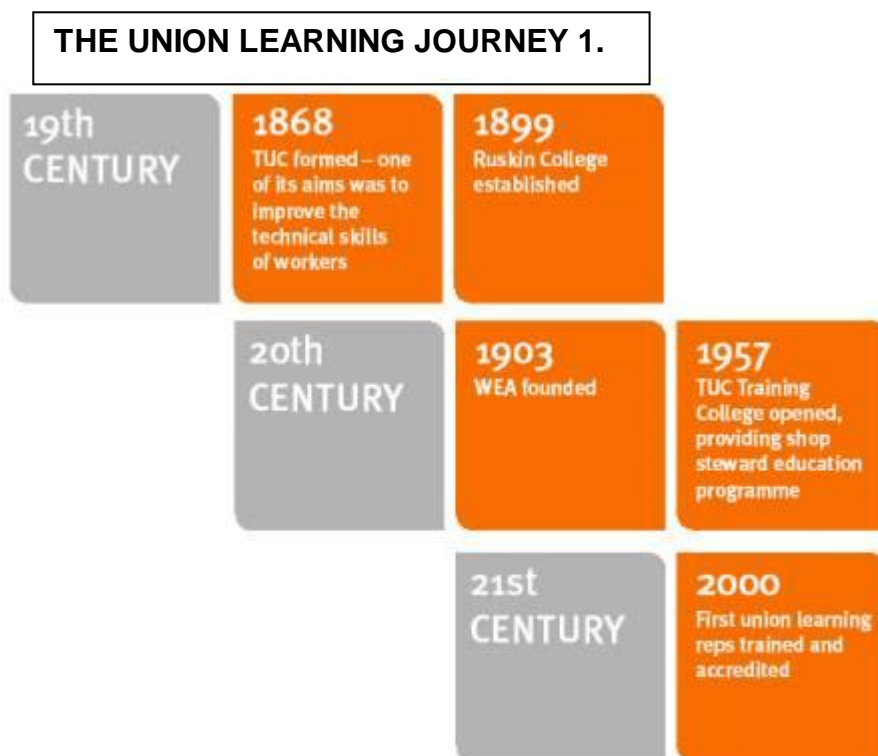
## THE UNION LEARNING JOURNEY

### The UK Trades Union Congress Story

The history of union learning is a long and progressive one. It begins with the colleges established for the education of working people, which were set up in the late nineteenth century, closely followed by the founding of the **Workers' Educational Association**. The opening of the **TUC Training College** after the Second World War gave a big boost to the training of trade union representatives. This increased with the huge growth in demand for union representative training as a result of employment and health and safety legislation in the 1970s.

Even in the politically cold climate of the early 1990s, TUC Regions formed partnerships with **Training and Enterprise Councils**. These **Bargaining for Skills Projects** promoted union involvement in training at the workplace. They developed into **TUC Learning Services** under the new Labour Government, extending such activity into areas such as **Skills for Life**, Information, Advice and Guidance and the Training of **Union Learning Representatives** (ULRs):

A new type of union activist, the **Union Learning Representative** (ULR), has been instrumental in raising interest in training and development, especially among the lowest skilled workers and those with literacy and numeracy needs.



Source: [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)

An important landmark was the setting up of the **Union Learning Fund** in 1998, which has disbursed £81.5m. Many of the union-led projects involved recruiting ULRs and establishing workplace learning centres. This activity was greatly enhanced through the statutory recognition of ULRs in 2002 and the establishment of the Trade Union Hub, which supports learndirect centres.

The DfES announcement in 2005 of an allocation of £4.5m towards establishing **Unionlearn** is a testament to the efficacy and quality of this activity over recent years.

## THE UNION LEARNING JOURNEY 2.



Source: [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)

### The UK Union Record

- Every year more than 42,000 union representatives are trained through the TUC Education Service.
- More than 13,000 ULRs have been trained.
- More than 450 Union Learning Fund projects have been run, covering over 3,000 workplaces.
- More than 67,000 learners access courses each year through the projects.
- The Trade Union Hub runs 87 learndirect centres.

### Unionlearn Targets

For 2006/2007

- 3,500 new ULRs to be trained
- 600 ULRs progressing to Skills for Life module
- 18,000 Skills for Life learners
- 4,000 NVQ 2 learners
- 100,000 learners going through the union route.

By 2010

- 22,000 union learning reps in place (currently about 20,000 in 2009)
- 250,000 learners going through the union route.

## CONCLUSION

According to the 1972 UNESCO Faure Report *'Learning to Be'* and subsequently developed in the 1996 Delors Report *'Learning: The Treasure Within'*, education throughout life is based on:

### **'Four pillars of lifelong learning':**

- **Learning to know**
- **Learning to do**
- **Learning to live together and**
- **Learning to be**

Whilst it is apparent that our countries are all very different in terms of culture and development, it can be argued that UNESCO's **'Four pillars of lifelong learning'** are pertinent to all countries. Therefore, these principles are, as the *'Learning to Be'* Report asserted, as applicable to developing countries as they are to developed countries.

In the UK the vast majority of companies are Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and whilst they are in the formal sector, they are in the main, un-organised by Trade Unions. Most workers are employed in these SMEs. Trade Union membership density in the UK is less than 30% and the unions are more organised in the Public Sector. To enable UK Trade Unions to reach their full potential in promoting Lifelong Learning the Labour Government needs to; institute the ILO Convention in full, include 'Training' in cases where 'Statutory Recognition' is awarded and, most importantly, it must review the right to Statutory Union Recognition in companies with less than 20 workers.

As democracies our countries face serious challenges, not least, in how to live in tolerance with others, how to maintain economic growth and development and share the proceeds of this growth in an equitable and sustainable way and how to care for the environment we all share. We need also to decide what role Education and Learning will play in this shared future.

There is, to date, no evidence that the example of the UK-FORCE Food Social Partnership (UK-FFSP) outlined in this paper, has been replicated, in full, anywhere else in the UK. However, what does appear to be the case is that the UK-FFSP, at the very least, anticipated and may even have informed aspects in the development of UK Government Strategy on Lifelong Learning and partnership relations approach. The UK-FFSP may even have influenced the many diverse approaches to partnership relations and workplace learning across the UK.

Each country has its own experience and distinct challenges. It may be that for other countries, some relevant lessons can be identified from the UK experience. However, it must be acknowledged that the lessons gleaned from the UK-FFSP have not been implemented in full in the UK and that each country will develop its own distinct system. There is certainly much that the UK can learn from other countries.

The EU concept of Social Partnership is only one model for developing 'trust relations' between the stakeholders in a society. It is quite clear that: the UNESCO concept of Lifelong Learning is as strong today for informing and driving democratic human endeavours as it was nearly 40 years ago; that Workers, Trade Unions and Employers increasingly working in partnership can be a force for democracy and a more cohesive and inclusive and fair society – and that this has never more necessary than it is today.

-ENDS-