

Useful Contacts

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Trade Union Members and their Learning Needs

Trade union members have different types of learning need, depending on their roles in the trade union movement and their level of involvement. This paper discusses ways in which learning centres can engage with members to facilitate relevant learning.



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There are four different contexts for the learning needs of Scottish trade union members depending on their role in the trade union movement - lay member or official - and their level of involvement. Trade union learners will fall into one or more of these categories:

- Officer and Lay Activists
- Officer as Manager
- Union Learning Representative
- Lay member

A trade union member may, for example, be very active and committed to campaigning or not particularly active but seeking to access union 'branded' learning as a 'service' provided by their union. For example, Unison offers a wide range of learning programmes from Return2Learn in partnership with the Workers' Educational Association (aimed at bringing excluded groups back into learning) to fairly demanding programmes in Information and Communication Technology available through their virtual college.

learndirect scotland and the learning centre network could have a role in all of these forms of learning because as well as the role learndirect scotland has as an information provider, several of the union courses are now online and learning centres, as well as providing access to the internet, can offer facilities to allow face to face dialogue.

Officers and Lay Activists

The kind of learning sought by this group is key 'technical' knowledge such as health and safety, employment law, organising issues and perhaps also lifelong learning although for reasons explained below a new form of union activist, a union lifelong learning representative (ULR), has emerged as a result of legislation.

For all of the areas identified above the Trades Union Congress (TUC) provides a range of programmes from basic to higher education level. All of these are accredited through the Open College Network and all are delivered through a network of further education colleges in Scotland. This provision is free for the learner. A contact list is available at the end of the text.

Learning centres could advertise that any trade unionists wanting to undertake trade union courses online would be able to access them at the centre. An added attraction would be working with any other trade unionists using the centre.



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Demand for learning programmes has increased dramatically amongst trade unionists



Officers as Managers

Trade union officers, as well as having an organising and advocacy role in relation to their members, are also often managers supporting staff and resource needs. Traditionally, these needs have not been well served by the trade union movement and many such officers might well be interested in generic management courses for specific areas, such as human resource management or more general management courses.

Learning centres could advertise, for example in the Scottish Trades Union Congress newsletter, that they provide online short courses in management that can be undertaken by union officers.

Union Learning Representatives

The Employment Act 2002 gave statutory time off for trade union learning representatives for the first time to ensure that they are adequately trained to carry out their duties. The Act required such representatives to undertake a course of study endorsed by the TUC and individual trade unions. In England and Scotland, Union Learning Funds were set up to facilitate the training of union learning representatives and fund learning activity. As well as the TUC programme run in the way described above, there is also an online version currently being piloted and some unions, for example Unison, have developed a tailored version of the TUC programme for their members. Hundreds of union learning representatives have now been trained.

Union learning representatives have expressed a desire for more contact with each other. Learning centres could be a locus for discussion and experience sharing, and could provide access to the online course for union learning representatives.

Lay members

Demand for learning programmes has increased dramatically amongst trade unionists. Union learning representatives have promoted a wide range of learning programmes in vocational and non-vocational areas.

Learning centres could try making contact with local union learning representatives through the STUC Lifelong Learning Officer and make them aware of the opportunities available in the centre.

Everyday skills

The STUC is particularly targeting people who require help with literacy and numeracy - described by the STUC as Everyday Skills. The STUC is running a Pathfinder project to develop a Scottish trade union strategy for adult literacy and numeracy in the workplace. It has also designed and delivered a basic Everyday Skills course for tutors, which has encourage some union learning representatives to seek further training. The Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning (ITALL) course was deemed the most appropriate qualification for union members.

Learning centres could provide a location for union learning representatives to work with Everyday Skills learners who may wish to avoid using the workplace because of the stigma attached to literacy needs.

Future Developments - a Scottish Union Academy

To help develop its learning agenda, the STUC is prioritising the creation of a Scottish Union Academy, which will be owned and run by trade unions. It will be accountable to the STUC General Council, with strong working links with the TUC. The academy is expected to be fully operational by Spring 2007.

It would be useful for learning centres to work closely with the new academy at local and Scottish level.

Colleges Running TUC Education Courses

Aberdeen
Dundee
Forth Valley
Adam Smith
Inverness
Reid Kerr (Paisley)
Stevenson (Edinburgh)
Stow (Glasgow)

TUC Online Courses in Scotland

Health & Safety Stage 1
Health & Safety Stage 2
Health & Safety Awareness for SME's
Certificate in Occupational Health & Safety
Union Learning Representatives

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One particular group of learners targeted by the trade union movement has been those identified as having needs in relation to literacy and numeracy