



**Unite Response to the  
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills:  
Time to Train Consultation**

**This response is submitted by Unite. Unite is the UK's largest trade union with 2 million members across the private and public sectors. Our members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction, transport and local government, education, health and not for profit sectors.**

**Executive Summary**

- **Unite welcomes the proposals laid out in the Consultation Paper but is disappointed that it does not go further and provide paid time off for training;**
- **Evidence suggests both a huge gap in the amount of training being undertaken and a financial under investment in employees;**
- **Significant investment must be given to incentivise SMEs to train workers;**
- **There should be no exemptions to who can receive training irrespective of the size of the organisation;**
- **There should be close monitoring of the reasons given for refusal to train;**
- **The role of the Union Learning Representative should be recognised as a key facilitator in the promotion of learning in the workplace;**
- **Unite remains convinced that further progress would be possible if skills and training formed part of the collective bargaining agenda.**

## **Introduction**

1. As an organisation which has long campaigned around the issue of workplace training, Unite very much welcomes the proposals laid out in the Consultation Paper as a huge step forward in encouraging a learning culture in the workplace. However we are disappointed that it does not go further and provide for paid time off for training.
2. Skills and the training agenda are a core trade union activity and through working together with employers and government, Unite believes that a fundamental change in the learning environment in the workplace is possible.
3. Unite remains convinced however, that further improvement towards achieving the high performing workplaces required to compete in the global economy would be progressed more speedily, if skills and training formed part of the collective agreements, with trade unions able to negotiate on behalf of employees on personal and professional development. Unite will continue to lobby government on this issue.

## **Right to Training**

4. The statutory right proposed which is based on the right to request flexible working and includes the right to be accompanied, will provide employees and their representatives with the confidence to approach employers to discuss future skills and training needs.
5. The success of the right to request flexible working highlighted the need for cooperation and a change in attitudes and behaviours on the part of employers towards different approaches to working. The proposals laid out in the Consultation Paper will require further support from employers which in the long run should create not only a more skilled workforce but also a more productive workforce.

## **Paid time off for training**

6. The proposals do not compel employers to pay for training and while it is anticipated that the present levels of investment in training by employers will continue and further be enhanced by additional funding opportunities through Train to Gain, this is not guaranteed particularly given the present economic climate in the UK.
7. Unite would therefore wish to see the proposals extended to include the right for paid time off for training. Unite also remains committed to the introduction of a statutory training levy introduced by government for all employers who do not provide a skills and training development programme for workers.

## Training - who gets it?

8. According to the Learning and Skills Council's 2007 National Employer Skills Survey (NESS) only 48% of workplaces have a training plan; 63% of employees in the workplace are involved in training and only 35% of employers have a budget for training.<sup>1</sup> This leaves a huge gap in both the amount of training being undertaken and an economic under investment by employers in human capital within their organisations.
9. The NESS survey further identified that the size of the workforce is a key determinant of likelihood to receive training. In establishments with over 25 employees two thirds of the workforce are likely to receive training and in workplaces with between 5 and 24 staff 61% of staff will receive training. This falls to just 46% in establishments with between 2 and 4 staff.<sup>2</sup> Therefore training is less likely in smaller workplaces.
10. Given that SMEs account for 99.9% of all enterprises and 59.2% of private sector employment,<sup>3</sup> (80% in the manufacturing industry), added incentives to train must be made available to smaller employers. This should include significant investment from government and other agencies to incentivise SMEs to offer training to workers.
11. For the UK economy to meet and improve upon the existing productivity targets for economic growth of 3% set in the Lisbon Strategy, UK output per worker must improve.
12. The UK's productivity level lags behind that of our comparator nations. According to the Leitch Review of Skills the average French worker produces 20% more per hour than the average UK worker. The average German worker produces 13% more and the average US worker 18% more.<sup>4</sup>

## To train or not to train

13. The NESS survey identified that the most common reason given by employers for not providing training is that their staff are 'fully proficient'<sup>5</sup>. However this same survey also shows that a skills gap exists across all occupations due to a lack of skills and experience. A lack of staff motivation (28%), failure to train and develop staff (20%), and the failure of staff to keep up with change (19%) were all common causes of skills gaps.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> LSC National Employers Skill Survey 2007: Key Findings

<sup>2</sup> NESS 2007 (ibid) page 20 para 81

<sup>3</sup> <http://stats.berr.gov.uk/ed/sme/smestats2007-ukspr.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy (Dec 2006)

<sup>5</sup> NESS 2007 (ibid) page 25 para 113

<sup>6</sup> NESS 2007 (ibid) page 12 para 54

14. The right to request training should include a range of training opportunities. The range should be broad and should provide not only for basic skills but also for up-skilling, changing career direction and for both vocational and non vocational training.
15. Opportunities for training must be available to all employees. Unite believes that there should be no exemptions to who can receive training, whether in a small company of 2 or 3 employees or a large organisation employing many hundreds.
16. Unite also believes there should be no reason for an employer to refuse a reasonable request for time to train and further, the inclusion in the list of reasons not to grant time off for training to include a 'burden of additional cost' must be closely monitored.
17. It is vital that information is made available to inform employers, particularly SMEs, of support agencies and sources of additional funding in order to alleviate any possible opportunities to refuse requests on this basis.

### **ULRs and workplace training**

18. It is generally accepted that the role of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in the promotion of learning in the workplace can have a very positive impact on the culture and coverage of learning while at work.
19. Unite has anecdotal evidence supporting this assumption which is supported by Unionlearn research using findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS).
20. The Unionlearn research shows the link between ULRs and the increased probability of receiving training.

*“The presence of a ULR in the workplace is associated with an increased likelihood of 5.2% of receiving 2 to 5 days training, an increased likelihood probability (5.2%) of receiving 5 to 10 days training, and a 6.7% increase in the odds of receiving the highest amounts of training (more than 10 days).”<sup>7</sup>*

### **Unite Case Study**

21. One of the largest employers in Northern Ireland supplies 2 hours paid leave per week for Essential Skills and facilities for any IT or further education classes. The company recently adopted Essential Skills as part of their own internal company-wide training goals. Unite is also currently negotiating with the company to include basic IT as a paid

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<sup>7</sup> Unionlearn: Training, union recognition and collective bargaining: Findings from the 2004 WERS (p14 para 4) Research paper 4 June 2007

leave class and is confident that a positive outcome on targets for training can be reached.

22. There are 3 sites and each site has literacy, numeracy and IT classes running. The paid time off has encouraged sign up and attendance, there is already a waiting list and ULRs can plan in advance with the company as to workable numbers being released. This process is now part of the fabric of the company and all senior line management are aware and supportive of the process.

“Through Union Learning we have had learners identified with dyslexia, receiving help both from the college and the company. We have had at least 8 promotions due to the basics being looked after and the learner is more confident to progress.

The company are delighted with this internal promotion and hold these individuals up as examples.

We now have a long list of employees waiting to get on the courses as they see the benefits and that the company is committed to their training and progression.” *Unite ULR*

23. Unite is aware of the opportunities which exist for both employers and employees by investing in skills. The proposals laid out in this Consultation Paper offer an excellent starting point to begin dialogue with employers on skills and training. However, Unite believes that real progress will only take place when the learning agenda becomes an integral part of the collective bargaining agenda with trade unions in a position to negotiate with employers on behalf of our members.

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