



**Unite the Union response to the Innovation, Universities and Skills
Select Committee Inquiry
After Leitch: Implementing Skills and Training Policies**

This response is submitted by Unite the Union. Unite is the UK's largest trade union with 2 million members across the private and public sectors. The union's 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

- **Skills and training must be enshrined within collective agreements;**
- **Introduction of a training levy;**
- **Expansion of ULRs and increase in funding to ULF;**
- **Trade union seats on delivery and funding bodies;**
- **Paid time off for training;**
- **Increase in apprenticeship minimum wage and encouragement of atypical recruits;**
- **Apprenticeship targets on all public procurement projects.**

Collective Bargaining

1. **Unite has witnessed a lack of investment in training by employers across a number of industrial sectors and a lack of commitment to**

training, as identified by the limited number of employers who have signed up to the Governments skills 'Pledge', first proposed by Lord Leitch. If we wait until 2010 as Leitch recommends, or later as has been proposed recently, and for a mere right to training to level 2, we are in danger of doing too little too late.

2. Therefore, a fundamental issue for Unite is the right to bargain with employers on learning and skills. While the proposals put forward in the DCSF/DIUS Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver consultation is for a more strategic and coordinating role for local authorities, this may prove ineffective if employers fail to engage with the learning agenda with either the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or as is planned, Local Authorities.
3. Engaging employers in the skills agenda may also prove difficult, particularly in times of economic downturn, with some employers espousing rhetoric rather than action when it comes to training their workforce.
4. That is why Unite is campaigning for skills and training to be enshrined within collective agreements in order that trade unions can negotiate with employers on this key element which is vital for the success of the business.

Funding for training

5. Despite CBI figures which indicate that billions of pounds are spent every year on training at work, it is recognised that a significant proportion of this is spent on health and safety training or other statutorily or regulatory required training. It is also evident that training is not evenly distributed throughout the working population, with those already with advanced skills and those in more senior positions, gaining disproportionately more training than those on the lower rungs of the career ladder with less skills.¹
6. Therefore in order to ensure an even distribution of funding and to ensure employer buy-in, Unite proposes a statutory training levy is introduced. This will act to ensure adequate funding; that training is made available to all and that the current system is not overstretched. It will also ensure employers take their responsibility to train seriously.

Paid time off for training

7. Unite is also campaigning for a statutory right to paid time off for training.
8. It is evident from the skills gap between the UK and our competitors that employers are failing to provide an adequate level of training to

¹ TUC Report: Training who gets it? Nov 2005

compete with our economic partners. Indeed Lord Leitch has identified this problem in his review of skills.

9. Unite welcomes the proposals for the right to request time off for training outlined in the Education and Skills Bill however believes that this could be enhanced further by providing paid time off for the training delivered.
10. It is vital that employers bear a significant proportion of the costs associated with training people when in work, given that it will be employers who have the most to gain from an educated and skilled workforce. This is especially true when the training involves sector specific training.
11. Given that the majority of employers in the UK are SME's, Unite also accepts that some smaller employers may have resource implications and find it more difficult financially to provide training. Government funding should be made available to assist SMEs in ensuring that SME's and their employees do not lose out in the global skills race.

Demand-led training and the role of ULRs

12. Unite believes that the demand-side approach put forward in the DCSF/DIUS² consultation paper could be enhanced through recognition of the role trade unions and specifically Union Learner Reps (ULRs) play in working with employers to support and deliver learning in the workplace. Employer/employee engagement works most effectively in workplaces where there is recognised trade union involvement. Unite therefore identifies a strong role for trade unions in a demand-led training environment in articulating the needs of learners.
13. The positive impact of ULRs in encouraging take-up of training opportunities is well documented, particularly among under represented groups. Unite and the wider trade union movement have been instrumental in driving a demand-led skills agenda within the workplace, with over 18,000 ULRs in the UK engaging with workers on both vocational and non vocational training everyday.
14. Unite will continue to actively recruit, train and support ULRs. Whilst welcoming the additional £3m of funding made available to the Union Learning Fund (ULF) by the Government last year we would argue that this increase in demand must be met by further such increases in funding in the future.

Stakeholder engagement

15. It is vital that the voice of trade unions and other stakeholders interested in the learning agenda is heard. Unite would therefore wish

² DCSF/DIUS Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver

to ensure that trade unions are given a leading role in articulating and supporting employee demand for learning by ensuring a trade union representative is on the board of all skills delivery and funding bodies. This would include the new arrangement which is put in place following the abolition of the LSC in 2010, and that this is mirrored at a local level where appropriate.

Apprenticeships

16. Lord Leitch's proposals, 'for a significant increase in apprenticeship places for every suitably qualified young person by 2013', is welcomed. However, delivery of this ambitious plan requires co-operation between a number of groups, not least of all employers, with questions still unanswered on responsibility for delivery, issues over quality of provision and inevitably, over funding.
17. Unite is unsure that these questions have been addressed and would wish to explore this issue further.
- Unite would propose high quality employer places together with a firm commitment from Government to guarantee the resources to provide an apprenticeship at the appropriate level to those with appropriate qualifications.
 - More must be done to encourage completion rates, which in manufacturing stands at 63%. Unite needs to see a clear and strategic programme of work, both inside the company and at any centre of learning.
 - Unite would also wish to see wages for apprentices more closely linked to the minimum wage and a real effort to acknowledge and address the current gender inequality in apprenticeship pay. For example, the TUC has evidence of female apprentices being paid £1.54 per hour³.
 - Wider equality and gender segregation issues within the apprentice system must also be addressed to encourage equity and diversity and create a more representative labour market reflecting the communities where firms are located.
 - Unite also believes that ULRs could provide a mentoring role within the apprenticeship system to support apprentices and is keen to work with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) to encourage entry by under represented groups.
 - Unite would also support a scheme whereby financial support could be given to apprentices who have to travel away from

³ TUC Report: Decent Pay for Apprentices

home to take up apprenticeships. Perhaps similar to a student grant or travel bursary.

- Unite would also wish to see government targets on apprentices involved in all public procurement projects with the continual promotion of equality and diversity within apprenticeship programmes.

Education and Skills Bill

18. Unite has concerns about the proposals contained within the Education and Skills Bill regarding education or training post-16 which emphasises a compulsion on young people to participate or face penalties. Unite is not convinced that the compulsory nature of the duty to participate will be successful.

19. The government seems intent on doing everything other than compelling employers to train their workforce. It would seem a perfectly reasonable request, if we are to ensure all young people are given the right skills before adulthood, to compel firms employing these young people, to train them.

20. It is also essential that adequate resources are put in place in order to fully support this initiative. e.g. if a young person 'drops out' of the system – then they are re-engaged as soon as possible. This may be a role for the guidance function within the education system or when in employment, a role for union workplace representatives, in particular ULRs. ULRs can and do provide a supportive function for learners in the workplace and this role could be expanded further looking specifically at a 'pastoral care' role.

Finally, Unite would be happy to develop any of the points raised in this response with the Committee.

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