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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

Evaluation of the quality and value of the education and training funded through the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF)



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
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- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk

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Introduction

- 1 The Welsh Assembly Government launched the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) in April 1999. Its aim is to maximise the contribution of trade unions to education and training in Wales by increasing the take-up of learning by non-traditional learners and increasing their skills.
- 2 In the 2008-2009 Ministerial remit to Estyn, the Welsh Assembly Government requested Estyn to undertake an evaluation of the quality and value of the education and training provided through WULF.
- 3 This report is based on meetings with a representative sample of union learning representatives, project managers, employers and employees who are taking part in WULF projects. Inspectors also met with Welsh Assembly Government officials responsible for the WULF programme. In this report, inspectors have also taken account of their views and supporting information and data.
- 4 The report provides an overview of the main findings of the review, a summary of their evaluation of the performance of WULF in relation to its stated aims and objectives and recommendations for improvement to WULF. Fuller detail of the inspectors' findings can be found in the subsequent pages of the report.
- 5 Estyn's reports follow its guidance for the writing and editing of reports, which is available on the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk). In this report, the following terms are used broadly to describe the proportions.

Nearly all	with very few exceptions
Most	90% or more
Many	70% or more
A majority	over 60%
Half/around half	close to 50%
A minority	below 40%
Few	below 20%
Very few	less than 10%

Main findings

- 6 Overall, the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) provides a useful contribution to supporting learning activities in the work place. Many employees and their families taking part in WULF programmes left school with little or no formal qualifications or have not taken part in education and training for a long time. They benefit from opportunities to improve their skills in a safe and supportive learning environment. Without this supportive environment, it is highly unlikely that they would have taken part in such activities. The education and training opportunities on offer help to increase the take-up of learning by non-traditional learners and to improve the skills in the workforce.
- 7 Key to the implementation of WULF is the strong partnership working between unions, employers and employees. Trade union project managers and union learning representatives (ULRs) effectively facilitate these partnerships. In the best cases, they work very closely with employers to enable employees to have good access to a wide range of courses in their workplaces.
- 8 The establishment of networks of excellence and the running of ULR seminars by WULF has been a major development. These networks give ULRs the opportunity to identify and share best practice across Wales. They also help ULRs to develop their knowledge of education and training and to be a support for other ULRs across Wales. Union learning representatives develop good links with other unions and key stakeholders and partners, such as Basic Skills Cymru and other education and training providers.
- 9 However, there is still not enough strategic liaison between different trade unions, with the result that learning programmes in areas such as basic skills, Welsh language and information and communications technology (ICT) are often duplicated across many WULF funded projects in the same geographical area. Working arrangements between the Welsh Assembly Government and Wales TUC are not close enough. They need to be strengthened, with a focus on improving Wales-wide data on WULF's education learning and provision and post-WULF funding issues. In addition, the distance travelled by learners to their most appropriate venue is sometimes further than it needs to be. For example, the bidding process could be strengthened to make sure that the range and levels of education and training opportunities as well as the number of learners across Wales are clearly agreed.
- 10 Many projects make slow progress during their first year. This is because it often takes a long time to recruit a project manager and ULRs. It also takes a long time for project managers and ULRs to liaise with employees to identify their needs and interests before they can start recruiting on to specific courses.
- 11 Many WULF funded projects rely too much on staff from further education colleges to deliver the programmes. Project managers do not do enough to identify what alternative options are available, such as developing better links with other providers of workplace, family, or adult and community learning. However, many WULF projects do benefit from strong links with the Workers' Education Association (WEA), a voluntary provider of adult education.

- 12 Planning for the sustainability of projects following the end of WULF funding is weak. Project managers and ULRs can clearly identify which elements of a project have worked well and could continue. However, they are frequently unable to identify a viable way forward without ongoing WULF funding or funding from the employer. This means that learners and potential learners no longer have the opportunity to undertake education or training in their workplaces. In many cases, this also prevents employees who have started a WULF course from progressing to the next level or completing their training.

Evaluation of WULF performance against its aims and objectives

- 13 **WULF's aims are to:**

- **support learning activities led by trade unions in partnership with employers and others which add value to other publicly funded learning.**

WULF effectively supports learning activities facilitated by trade unions and their good working partnerships with employers and other WULF funded projects. However, with the exception of Basic Skills Cymru, there is little evidence to link this to other publicly funded training provision.

- **raise the skills of the workforce.**

Overall, employees who undertake WULF education and training improve their individual skills and knowledge. Many achieve a formal qualification for the first time. Some employees have gained promotion in their work place.

- **increase the take-up of learning by non-traditional learners.**

WULF effectively engages non-traditional learners to engage in education and training in their workplaces. However, the extent of this take-up is not monitored effectively enough.

- 14 **WULF's objectives are to:**

- **increase trade unions' capacity to promote learning by providing new facilities and materials and developing a systematic long-term approach to promoting learning.**

In most WULF projects, employees benefit from a dedicated learning room located in their employer's premises. These rooms usually contain computers, a useful range of software, books and literature relating to the education and training courses which are available to employees and their families. However, in most cases, when WULF funding ends the room is no longer used by employees to undertake learning. As a result, employees' education and learning usually finishes. Inspectors found no evidence of any long-term approach to promoting life-long learning.

- **develop innovative ways of encouraging learning. This includes developing new or different learning outcomes, for example providing certification of learning or accessing further learning through agreements with local education and training providers, and the identification and sharing of good practice from WULF projects across the provision.**

Project managers and ULRs working with employees encourage many employees to engage in learning effectively. As an initial introduction to learning, they ask learners to identify and discuss their hobbies and interests. This helps staff to identify suitable training opportunities for learners and to engage them with related education and learning issues. Initial education or training may also include developing and supporting the employees' 'soft' skills, such as communication or confidence building. Initial formal courses often include the use of computers and digital photography. Many employees achieve recognition and accreditation for their learning for the first time in their lives.

Project managers and ULRs form effective partnerships with local further education colleges. However, they do not undertake enough research to see what other training providers offer. Effective networks of excellence have been developed to enable project managers, ULRs and other key partners to identify and share best practice across geographical regions.

- **provide additional advice, guidance and support for employees. This can be provided in partnership with employers and should add to the existing range of support services available to employers.**

Overall, project managers and ULRs give employees good levels of guidance and support to encourage them to undertake education or training. In many cases, project managers and ULRs work effectively with a wide range of employers to nurture and develop strong partnerships. Employees facing redundancy from their jobs receive good support from ULRs. They receive training in job-seeking, applying for jobs and coaching in preparation for interviews.

- **widen participation: breaking down barriers in the workplace by supporting interventions which focus on equality of opportunities, social inclusion and non-traditional learners.**

WULF effectively engages non-traditional learners in learning in a 'supportive' environment in their workplaces. Non-union members and union members have equal access to WULF education and training opportunities. The families of employees also have good access to ULRs and education and training programmes.

- **significantly improve basic, converged and essential skills in the workforce, for example by promoting the uptake of the Employers' Pledge and by supporting the work of Sector Skills Councils to strengthen skills in specific employment sectors.**

Project managers and ULRs place a high priority on improving employees' basic skills. In many cases, the confidence and self-esteem of employees is increased as they develop and improve their basic skills. Project managers work well to engage employers effectively to sign-up to the Employers' Pledge as a way of formally demonstrate their commitment to supporting their employees to improve their basic skills. There is very good involvement by employers who actively support WULF, especially in employment sectors such as transport, the fire brigade and the post office. However, there is not enough evidence of WULF involvement with Sector Skills Councils¹.

- **form part of and add value to a unions' strategy for learning. Projects should also link to other lifelong learning programmes.**

WULF is a key strand of the TUC's strategy for lifelong learning. WULF projects link well to Basic Skills Cymru, as well as giving employees opportunities to undertake accredited and non-accredited courses, such as the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

- **support and foster effective partnership activity between employers, other trade unions, and education and training providers. Sector Skills Councils and community-based organisations, in order to encourage more people into learning.**

Overall, WULF is an effective partnership between trade unions and employers. Many project managers and ULRs have developed effective working relationships and partnerships with a wide range of further education colleges. However, there is little involvement with other work-based learning providers, adult learning providers, Sector Skills Councils or community-based organisations.

- **create sustainable learning by effectively using resources and support from partners in order to sustain activity beyond the initial WULF funding period. This involves securing the longer-term commitment and resources from employers, training providers and other trade unions.**

Overall, planning for the sustainability of WULF projects at the end of their funding period is weak. This means that current learners and potential learners no longer have the opportunity to undertake education or training in their workplaces.

¹ Sector Skills Councils lead the skills and productivity drive in industry or business sectors recognised by employers. Employer-led and independent they bring together employers, learning providers, trade unions and professional bodies to work with the Welsh Assembly government to develop the skills that businesses in Wales need.

Recommendations

15 **The Welsh Assembly Government, in partnership with Wales TUC needs to:**

- extend WULF projects up to three years to make sure employees receive at least two full years of education and training;
- improve the bidding process to make sure that trade unions and learners maximise the WULF funded education and training opportunities available;
- work with employers and unions to improve the sustainability of WULF programmes at the end of their funding period;
- improve the collection and analysis of data on the outcomes for participants undertaking WULF education and training courses including the monitoring of the skills and qualifications gained by employees;
- evaluate the impact and outcomes of WULF annually;
- reduce the duplication of WULF funded provision and encourage better partnership working across trades unions; and
- identify ways of ensuring links with other publicly funded training support in addition to its current linkage to Basic Skills Cymru.

16 **The Wales TUC needs to:**

- improve partnership working across unions to enable them to effectively share good practice and resources;
- work with the Welsh Assembly Government to develop a data collection and analysis system, across all unions, to record data and information about all aspects of training undertaken by employees; and
- develop ways to measure the impact of WULF funded education and training on individuals and groups of employees, in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly Government.

17 **WULF project managers need to:**

- make sure that, where appropriate, all employees receive basic skills support at a suitable level;
- fully engage with employers to maximise the availability and sustainability of learning opportunities for employees and their families when WULF funding has ended;
- work with Wales TUC and other unions to continue to share good practice on WULF projects; and
- develop partnerships with other providers of education and training to support the delivery of WULF funded programmes.

Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF)

Background

- 18 The Welsh Assembly Government launched WULF in April 1999 in order to support learning activities to be led by trade unions in partnership with employers and others and to increase the take-up of learning by non-traditional learners.
- 19 In many cases, employees and their families have not undertaken education or training for long periods of time. Many have been employed at the companies where they work and have been doing the same or a very similar job for a number of years. In many cases, potential learners are fearful of undertaking any form of education or training due to their prior experiences and their fear of failure. Many employees come from diverse social backgrounds and have not participated in education or training since leaving school. Many ULRs carefully match the education and training on offer to the needs of individual employees. Many courses have high learner retention rates, often in excess of 90%.
- 20 WULF is used to engage union, non-union employees and family members into education and training. When unions develop joint bids, they are usually successful in engaging large numbers of employees. It is a key condition of each WULF project that non-union members have equal access to the same education and training activities as their work colleagues who are union members. While funding is not available for direct union-related activities, there is a wide range of accredited and non-accredited courses available, such as information and communications technology (ICT), the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and Welsh language provision.
- 21 All projects are required to form part of a wider union strategy for learning. They should develop new approaches to learning in the workplace and identify and share best practice.
- 22 All funded projects should also involve an element of joint working with partners. However, funding is not available for projects which focus on union negotiating or bargaining with employers, membership recruitment, training of union representatives, careers advice and guidance or projects which replace employer funded or work related training.
- 23 Since April 1999, there have been 127 projects funded through WULF and approximately £6.8m of financial support provided by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 24 The period of funding for each WULF project is currently 24 months. For projects starting in 2009, the maximum available for each project is £120,000.

The features of WULF provision

Project lead time

- 25 When a project is approved and funding secured, it often takes an excessive length of time to recruit the project manager, establish the Union Learning Representatives (ULR), set-up a learning room, if required, and start to recruit employees onto learning programmes. This process can often take several months. As a result, many employees do not benefit from two full years of funded lifelong learning opportunities.

Learning agreements

- 26 Learning agreements are a useful tool to formalise arrangements between the unions and the employer. Where good employer/union relationships exist, these agreements act as confirmation of effective partnership and joint working. When working relationships are not as good, the agreements act as a useful tool to remind employers of the agreement they have made. However, some learning agreements are not reviewed periodically and updated by the trade union involved to make sure that the employer is fully aware of the commitment they have made to the WULF funded project.
- 27 Many WULF project managers and ULRs have developed good relationships with staff at local further education colleges and the WEA. Many WULF courses are delivered by college staff at the employee's premises. However, too much reliance is placed on the use of further education staff to deliver programmes. Project managers and ULRs need to engage more fully with other providers of education and training in their area, including community organisations and Sector Skills Councils. There is not enough joint working across unions on effective sharing of resources, such as pooling teaching staff.

Project managers and Union Learning Representatives (ULRs)

- 28 The project managers and ULRs have key roles in ensuring the success of each WULF project, in particular in workforce development and in engaging hard to reach employees in relation to engagement in education and training. All ULRs are employees of their company and complete a five day TUC funded course to enable them to effectively undertake their role. Union Learning Representatives are the direct link between the employer and learner. It is essential for ULRs to work effectively with their employer to ensure employees get full access to WULF provision. ULRs are effective in this role and work well to support employees in accessing training. They also work effectively with employers to promote the benefits of further education and training of the workforce and the benefits that would bring to the employer, such as improved self-confidence and motivation of employees. A few ULRs are also Union shop stewards or representatives.
- 29 It is usually of benefit to WULF to separate the ULR and other union roles as each has a different interface within the company. In all cases, employers give ULRs a period of time away from their normal duties to undertake their role. However, in a few cases, employers do not give ULRs enough time to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

- 30 ULRs often help employees to overcome the barriers that many learners have when considering returning to education or training. These employees often believe they already have the skills and knowledge required to effectively undertake their job roles. They often feel that they do not need additional education or training. In many cases ULRs work well to engage these employees. They spend time explaining the benefits of further learning and encourage employees to discuss their interests and ambitions in order to identify and agree education or training programmes which will meet their individual needs. Many employees who complete these courses progress to courses at the next level of further education and training.

Initial assessment

- 31 Overall, initial assessment is used effectively before employees start their course. This is to find out if they need support and that they are working at the right level. Most employees benefit from good support from their tutors. The initial challenge for ULRs is to build the confidence of potential learners and to establish a 'building block' approach, for example to initially support the employees to undertake training and gradually build their confidence and self-esteem before they move on to further education or training.
- 32 ULRs and project managers work well to develop employees' basic skills. The employer has a key role to play in this process through the Employers' Pledge. This is a formal contract between the union and employer in which they agree to support their employees to improve their basic skills of literacy and numeracy in the workplace. Employers are encouraged to sign up to the 'Employers Pledge' to demonstrate their commitment to support the basic skills courses available for their employees. Employees with identified basic skills needs generally access appropriate support quickly. In many cases, employees are directed to a suitable course offered in the workplace.
- 33 WULF provides many employees with the opportunity to undertake education and training from a basic entry level to the more advanced level 3. A few employees undertake education or training at a higher level. Many employees benefit from good support and training activities which effectively helps the development of their 'soft skills', such as communication and developing self-confidence. Employees have good opportunities to develop further and higher skills including working with others and counselling. Employees facing redundancy from their jobs receive good support from ULRs. They receive training in job-seeking, applying for jobs and coaching in preparation for interviews.
- 34 In larger companies, employees participating in WULF often benefit from working with other employees who they would not normally work with. A few benefit from developing their confidence, self-esteem and skills to a level where they now feel able apply for promotion opportunities within the company.
- 35 Most employers allocate employees a dedicated training room. They allow employees to attend courses or to use the room as a study centre before or at the end of their working day or shift. In a very few cases, employees are allowed time off-the-job to attend courses in their workplaces. In a few workplaces production managers and shift supervisors restrict or prevent employees leaving their work station to undertake education or training, due to the need to meet production targets.

Partnership working

- 36 When WULF funded projects work well, there are good and effective working relationships between all key partners involved. In these cases, there is full support from the employers. This means that managers and supervisors fully support learning activities that are available and effectively support and encourage employees to attend training. In the best cases, this means releasing employees from their on-the-job role or partially releasing them to undertake training. In these companies, senior, middle and production managers recognise the benefits of lifelong learning for their employees. They recognise that employees show a noticeable improvement in their motivation and self-esteem and, as a result, become more confident in their work roles. In a few cases, these employees develop the skills and knowledge which allow them to apply for promotion opportunities or to seek other roles within the company.

Outstanding partnerships with employers

Project managers and ULR's have developed and sustained outstanding partnerships with employers. In Cardiff Bus, WULF funded education and training has had a positive impact on many staff. In Memory Lane Cakes, employees benefit from very good levels of basic skills support and in Sumitomo Electrical Wiring Systems (SEWS), a high number of employees have engaged in a wide range of education and training activities.

Tracking and recording of learners' progress

- 37 Individual project managers generally keep good records of the education and training that employees are undertaking in each of their projects. The TUC headquarters in Cardiff maintains useful data collection systems for monitoring the number of employees undertaking WULF funded training. However, neither the TUC nor the Welsh Assembly Government maintain an overarching data collection system which effectively captures and monitors all aspects of each WULF project, including the number of learners and the training activities which have been undertaken and completed.
- 38 Quarterly reports are required by the Welsh Assembly Government from each WULF project manager regarding the progress each individual project is making against the targets for the number of employees undertaking education and training. The Project Managers are also responsible for completing a project evaluation report at the end of the project. However, not all reports clearly state the number of employees undertaking education or training, the subject and the level. Overall, the Welsh Assembly Government is responsible for the collection of data from each WULF project manager. However, little analysis is made of the outcomes of the project that can usefully inform any impact assessment of WULF.

- 39 In a number of cases, there is duplication of provision. For example, basic skills and ICT courses are often delivered across a majority of WULF funded projects in the same geographical area. However, this is sometimes due to circumstances beyond the control of the union. For example, employers often have restricted access to their premises due to health and safety procedures or the fact that the premises are a manufacturing plant where access to people who are not employed by the company, such as tutors, is restricted.

Sustainability of projects once funding has ceased

- 40 Overall, planning for the sustainability of projects following the end of WULF funding is weak. Project managers and ULRs can clearly identify elements of a project that have worked well and could continue. However, they are unable to identify a viable way forward without ongoing WULF funding or funding from the employer or the individual employee paying for training themselves. This means that learners and potential learners no longer have the opportunity to undertake education or training in their workplaces. Importantly, it also prevents employees who have started a WULF course progressing to the next level or completing their training. In most cases, employees will not pay for continuing education or training themselves.
- 41 However, where employers do continue support after WULF has finished, many employees continue to benefit from the activities that WULF initially gave them. For example, many demonstrate improved self-confidence and self-esteem in their workplaces. Employees also demonstrate improved knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects, such as numeracy and literacy.
- 42 In a few occasions and in exceptional circumstances, the maximum funding may be increased if the project shows strong union collaboration, has considerable benefits to a wide range of participants and has the support of all other key partners operating in Wales.

The remit author and survey team

Mark Evans HMI	Author
Una Connolly HMI	Survey team