

**A survey of the quality of provision of  
Trade Union Education courses in Wales  
that are funded by the National  
Council-ELWa and the Welsh Assembly  
Government.**



**Estyn**

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg  
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
For Education and Training in Wales

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## **Introduction**

1. Estyn as a part of its 2004-2005 remit work for the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) was asked to undertake a survey of the quality of provision of Trade Union (TU) Education courses in Wales that are funded by the National Council-ELWa and the Welsh Assembly Government.
2. The Wales TUC Education Service has been established for many years. Its aim is to develop the skills of trade union workplace representatives. This includes their roles as trade union, health and safety and or learning representatives. This is achieved through facilitating the delivery of National Open College Network accredited Trade Union Studies courses through four centres across Wales. These courses support union representatives in the development of the skills that they need to undertake their trade union roles more effectively. The National Council-ELWa, through its further education funding system, and the Wales TUC education service through Welsh Assembly monies fund these courses.
3. Of the four centres in Wales accredited by the TUC to deliver its courses, three are located in South Wales at Bridgend College, Coleg Gwent, and the Workers Educational Association (delivers courses in the community). The fourth is in Deeside College in North Wales. Three of the current providers have well-established partnerships with Wales TUC. The fourth provider, Coleg Gwent, is a relatively new partner and started its first Wales TUC education course in September 2004.
4. The courses are based on National Open College Network units of accreditation and include topics such as the role of union representatives, using computers, equality, negotiating skills, health and safety and the union handling of disciplinary matters.

## **Methodology**

5. This report is based on evidence from visits to the four accredited centres and discussion with managers and teachers involved in the planning and delivery of the courses. Relevant provider documentation such as course review and evaluation reports were examined and evidence from recent Estyn inspection reports was considered. Meetings were also held with a representative of the Trade Union Education Centre in Wales. The findings of the report are structured around the seven key questions in Estyn's Common Inspection Framework. The key questions set out the criteria for inspecting the provision, and measuring the quality of education and training across all publicly funded learning in Wales.

6. The inspection framework and seven key questions focus on:

**a) The achievements of learners**

Key question 1: How well do learners achieve?

**b) The quality of education and training**

Key question 2: How effective are teaching, training and Assessment?

Key question 3: How well do the learning experiences meet the Needs and interests of learners and the wider Community?

Key question 4: How well are learners guided and supported?

**b) The effectiveness and efficiency of leadership and management**

Key question 5: How effective are leadership and strategic management?

Key question 6: How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?

Key question 7: How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?

## Summary

7. Wales TUC promotes the Welsh Assembly Government's lifelong learning strategy through supporting trade unions in engaging their members in learning opportunities.
8. Learners develop a range of life and work skills through attending the courses. They achieve very good standards and many learners are motivated to continue their learning. A number progress, for example, to higher education. The courses are well structured and teaching is of a high quality. Teachers' approach to learning is interactive and is based on real life situations. Teaching practices are inclusive. However, very little use is made of on-line learning in the delivery of these courses.
9. Partnerships between the centres and Wales TUC are well developed. Wales TUC provides centres with good support to help the development of their courses. However, a ceiling in the growth of learning units and therefore funding allocated to the centres through their ELWa further education funding could affect the centres' ability to deliver these courses in the future.
10. Wales TUC has procedures including the tracking of learners to quality assure the courses in meeting the needs of learners. However, often the tracking of learners is too informal. The day-to-day operational management of the quality of the courses is the responsibility of the centres. However, in its overall monitoring of the courses Wales TUC does not make enough use of the centres' quality information to inform its own quality management.
11. Learning and accommodation resources are generally good. Wales TUC supports teachers well in the delivery of high quality programmes. Learners benefit greatly from participating in the courses, building their self-confidence, helping them to become better union representatives, and developing positive values related to equality of opportunity
12. However there is not enough formal quantitative measure or evaluation of the success or impact of the courses. For example, the progression of learners, widening participation, and the increased effectiveness of learners when they return to the workplace. Nor are there any national benchmarks against which these can be measured.

## Recommendations

Wales TUC and the centres need to:

- R1 identify strategies and benchmarks to measure and evaluate more effectively and objectively the impact of Wales TUC Education courses on learners' personal progression and their effectiveness in the workplace;
- R2 measure and evaluate the effect of the Wales TUC Education courses on widening participation;
- R3 make more use of, the quality systems of the centres to help inform the effectiveness of the Wales TUC Education courses;
- R4 where appropriate, formally identify the basic and key skills levels and needs of learners;
- R5 measure and evaluate the cost effectiveness, and value for money of the courses;
- R6 build a clear profile of the learners who enrol on the courses and track their progress accordingly;
- R7 develop on-line strategies and materials, to support those learners who have difficulty attending courses; and
- R8 produce regular reports on the delivery, review and future development of courses by each centre.

## Main findings

### **a) The achievements of learners**

13. Learners come from very diverse backgrounds and have a wide range of educational, and social experiences and employment in both public and private sector organisations. A significant number are 'non-traditional' learners who have not participated in education or training since leaving school.
14. Their level of formal and personal achievement on entry to courses is often limited. Many did not do well at school. Their experience on these courses is often their first introduction to lifelong learning. They undertake the courses because they need the skills to better carry out their roles as trade union representatives. Learners achieve very good standards and outcomes. The courses have high retention rates. Completion and attainment rates are frequently above 90%.
15. Learners are encouraged to identify their individual learning targets and action plans throughout their studies. Most make excellent progress in their learning, and the development of their personal skills. However, there are no published national comparators for either the trade union studies courses or the National Open College Network units that make up the courses. It is therefore difficult to compare the attainment of different learner cohorts, the success of different courses, or how well learners achieve at the different centres.
16. Through their participation in these courses, learners acquire the basic skills and knowledge necessary to undertake their union duties. They also acquire a range of transferable skills, knowledge and understanding. In many cases, they also acquire more complex analytical and critical abilities and skills. They link their learning closely to their workplace responsibilities and activities as union representatives. They apply their knowledge and understanding of concepts well in their everyday roles.
17. Without exception, tutors report that the learners' experience of learning builds the learner's personal confidence and skills as well as developing appropriate skills for their trade union role. These include developing self-confidence and skills including communication, discussion and dialogue, negotiation, and developing a non-confrontational approach. Learners strongly support these comments through verbal and written feedback that they have given to their tutors.
18. Many learners become motivated to continue their learning. A high number return for at least one further trade union studies course. The centres frequently signpost learners to other courses outside of the trade union courses, for example information technology and business studies. Some learners progress onto further or higher level trade union studies courses as a result of their high level of motivation. A few progress to higher education. Some undertake a teaching qualification and progress to become lecturers on trade union studies courses.
19. The centres can give a general overview of learners' progression onto other courses and they are able to give many examples of 'success stories' where individual learners successfully undertake further study or progress in their work role. However, information is too anecdotal. There is not enough systematic analysis or tracking of learners to give an up-to-date, detailed and objective measure of how

many learners progress, and their ultimate destination. Neither centres, nor Wales TUC routinely collect or evaluate this information.

## **b) The quality of education and training**

20. Wales TUC courses equip union representatives to represent their members' interests in a climate of rapid change. Tutors make sure that the courses are relevant, useful, and accessible to all learners.
21. The courses are well structured. Teaching is of a high quality. Tutors plan courses very carefully with Wales TUC and employers to make sure that provision is broad enough to meet the needs of both employers and learners. The close working relationships of, and discussions between tutors and employers, leads to planning that breaks down any barriers to study that the learners may have.
22. The tutors' approach to learning is interactive and participatory. They take good account of the diversity of experience of the learners and the wide differences between workplaces. They use the workplace as a starting point for learning. Learners have to apply their knowledge in the workplace; so much of the teaching is based on real workplace tasks and problem solving. It is important that learners develop their skills, attitude and understanding so that they can approach their union representative duties in an appropriate manner.
23. Teaching reflects this through the use of group work, case studies, listening, debating and oral contribution in the classroom. Tutors encourage active learning by doing, and practising skills that will help the learners to work with other people in the classroom and in the workplace.
24. Learners' personal development is integral to courses. Programmes include a strong element of key skills, in particular communication, working with others, improving own learning and problem solving. Certain values and attitudes, such as equality and democracy, underpin the work of Wales TUC and its approach to teaching and learning. Tutors are expected to come from an appropriate background and have a representative point of view. They are expected to uphold the core values of the TUC and to have flexibility of approach.
25. To support this ethos, the TUC trains, updates and regularly briefs tutors through the TUC National Tutor Training programme. The training makes sure that tutors have good subject knowledge and are familiar and comfortable with the wider context in which union representatives operate and the policy framework to which the TUC is committed.
26. All learners participating in Trade Union Studies courses can have their achievements formally recognised. Courses are accredited through the National Open College Network. Learners are continually assessed through oral and written work. The modular, credit-based provision allows learners to be assessed, to achieve in 'bite sized pieces' and to progress through the courses in stages, according to their needs and abilities. For many, the achievement of Open College Network units is the first nationally recognised educational certificate that they have received.
27. Tutors confirm that accreditation, particularly unit accreditation, has been a great success, tightening course organisation and encouraging and motivating learners to

succeed.

28. Wales TUC and the centres' tutors aim to give learners a new experience of learning where they can contribute actively to their learning and development. Centres are flexible and run courses where they are needed. Generally the majority are held at the main centres, but also for example, in outreach and community centres. Courses may also be run in local workplaces or union offices when requested. Many courses are run during the learners' normal working hours.
29. The TUC has a wide range of courses available for union representatives. The courses give learning credits at levels one to three. These courses, particularly at stage one, form the bulk of the work undertaken by the centres. Centres find it more difficult to enrol enough learners on courses above stage one. Wales TUC and the centres are proactive in producing new courses when required.
30. For example, the Access programme is a new development in trade union education. This allows mature learners to enter higher education without the traditional qualifications, and prepares learners for higher education in, for example, study skills.
31. Currently little use is made of on-line learning to supplement and support classroom learning, and to widen access to those learners who have difficulty accessing education and training at the centres.
32. Partnership activities between Wales TUC and the centres are particularly good. Wales TUC has a commitment to working to expand provision, while the centres have a strong ethos of widening participation. Collaboration and consultation are important drivers in the partnerships.
33. Providers are also involved in a number of partnership projects with local union branches, affiliated trade unions and employers, who may be funded, for example through the Wales Union Learning Fund or local union or employer agreements. However, the quality of relationships with employers varies, depending on the commitment of the employers.
34. The centres frequently use the trade union courses as a mechanism to encourage 'first time' learners into other mainstream further education courses. However, there is very little quantitative information or systematic analysis on how successful, or otherwise, the courses are in engaging or sustaining learners in education and training. It is therefore difficult to ascertain the impact or effectiveness of the programmes in their contribution to lifelong learning.
35. Values such as equality of access and acceptance of diversity are integral to Wales TUC Education courses. This is demonstrable in the content and philosophy of the courses themselves, and in the work of the tutors.
36. Tutors have a strong commitment to equality and equity in their educational practice. Tutors challenge discriminatory attitudes and encourage shared attitudes and values of learners. Courses have a strong focus on advocacy, decision-making, equality,

and elimination of prejudice and racism. Tutors identify barriers to learning, but this is not always done formally and is sometimes identified as learners progress through their course.

37. Tutors support learners very well, both in their work and in helping with any personal difficulties that they may have when attending a course. Centres employ many different strategies to support learners. Those attending further education college centres are encouraged to take advantage of the wide range of specialist support systems available in the colleges. Adult community education centres ensure that basic skills support is integrated into learners' programmes.
38. However, because of the generally part-time nature of the courses, and the fact that some are delivered in the community away from the main centre, learners do not generally find it easy to take up the offer of formal support.
39. Learners' levels of basic skills are not formally assessed or recorded during their courses. However, in all cases very early on in the courses, centres use teaching and assessment activities to identify literacy or communication difficulties. Tutors make good use of different teaching and assessment strategies to support learners' that may have these difficulties.

### **c) The effectiveness of leadership and management**

40. Wales TUC and the centres have clearly defined roles and responsibilities within their partnerships. The different centres also work in partnership and support each other well. Initial contact with a prospective centre is normally between the TUC education service and the principal/chief executive of the organisation or his or her representative. Wales TUC liaises well with the centre before an initial course starts.
41. The growth and success of the Wales TUC courses in different centres is very much due to the strategic direction and the strong commitment of all staff at each of the centres. All centres agree that for TUC education to grow it needs investment. One of the largest and most successful centres has made a substantial investment in providing specialist accommodation for Wales TUC courses.
42. In further education colleges, courses are usually linked to a larger department. The size of provision varies, and is generally small in relation to the overall size of the organisation. Effective course teams, specialising in TUC education, deliver the programmes.
43. Wales TUC plans, predicts and prioritises the numbers of courses and learners for each academic year. It has an expectation that centres will continue to expand their provision. Recruitment targets are usually based on the previous year. Although Wales TUC sets national enrolment targets, centres set their own completion and attainment targets.
44. Wales TUC courses can help to increase the volume of student learning units achieved by the centre. However, student enrolments/learning units for TUC education courses are within the main college unit and funding allowance. This means that learning units can be used for other courses. Centres do not have ring fenced learning units for these courses, nor specific targets for enrolments from

ELWa.

45. Currently, organisations delivering further education courses have limited or nil growth in learning units. This capping of learning units can affect recruitment targets for the Wales TUC courses. Some centres report that, if they are to maintain or increase the volume of their provision, they may have to look for alternative forms of funding than from ELWa.
46. Communication between Wales TUC and centres is good. Wales TUC representatives meet regularly with regional training officers, department managers and course tutors. Meetings are very much based on need and include general discussions, for example on paperwork, finance issues, staffing, enrolments and the needs of employers.
47. The centres have full responsibility for managing the courses. Wales TUC acts as a regulator for courses. It works hard to make sure that unions work through Wales TUC, and in line with their courses. Centres develop effective partnerships with outside bodies such as employers and trade unions. These partnerships often impact positively on other areas of the centres' work.
48. Wales TUC education does not require centres to implement any specific quality arrangements. Nevertheless, it does monitor the performance of centres. Its representatives may visit classes and may request a sample of learner evaluation forms. It also holds initial monthly meetings with new centres. If courses are not satisfactory then Wales TUC will change the centre for delivery. However, it is not clear what the objective criteria or measurement of quality for this is based upon.
49. Usually the quality of Wales TUC courses is monitored and evaluated through the centres' quality framework and through the verification and moderation processes of the National Open College Network.
50. Centres track the progression and destinations of learners informally, for example through the different levels of the courses. Centres can provide general information on the profile of their learners; for example, they feel that more females are now participating in courses, and that generally learners are 'non-traditional' learners who have returned to learning.
51. However, such information is limited in providing tangible evidence that the widening participation agenda is being met, or that learners undertake their union roles more effectively. It does not appear that there are overarching end of year evaluation reports on these courses.
52. The TUC produces national materials for the core courses. Resources for Wales TUC courses are good and centres have a good range of resource information. Tutors are appropriately qualified with relevant work/management experience. Many tutors have gone through the TUC education system themselves and returned to teach on the courses, although centres do not have specific data on this. Tutors attend mandatory training provided by Wales TUC. Tutors also receive regular and updated information about new legislation and information relevant to the role of the union representatives. Teaching teams are generally permanent with a mix of full

and part-time teachers.

53. Accommodation is generally good. However, there may be constraints within a centre because of other provision. One centre, whose courses have increased, has lost a teaching room. Courses delivered in the community have more varied standards of accommodation.
54. Centres' income for the courses is calculated on the number of learners and the length of course. The target class size is 15 learners. However, classes do not always meet this target and are more likely to be between six and 10 learners. It is unusual for centres to run classes below this number. The cost of the course increases if it is delivered away from the main site. Sometimes Wales TUC provides additional funding to cover the cost of small classes.
55. It is very difficult to ascertain the degree to which TUC education courses represent good value for money because of the lack of availability of objective measurable information. In all cases, the current centres have made a positive strategic decision to offer these courses. The decision is not totally based on financial indicators, as the courses are not necessarily 'value for money' in terms of financial returns. Nevertheless managers are aware that the courses must give the centres 'added value'. A response from one centre commented that it might not be able to continue to offer these courses if they do not provide an acceptable level of income.
56. Without exception, centres comment that learners gain a considerable amount personally and within their work role, from participating in these courses. Tutors believe that learners develop a wider vision and different perspective. They are more objective and think before they speak; they have an increased awareness of their union roles and do a better job in the workplace; they are more co-operative, more skilful, better equipped, more confident and develop their key skills. A number of learners develop the confidence and motivation to continue with their education and training, both within other related courses and through broader education courses, including those at degree level.
57. The quality of many aspects of the courses is very good. However, much of the evaluation of the courses by Wales TUC and the centres is qualitative. It is too anecdotal and does not provide firm evidence of the effectiveness of the courses. This means that it is difficult at this stage to judge the success or otherwise of the courses in meeting Wales TUC aims of improving the effectiveness of the union representatives, of wider participation and the engagement of more individuals in lifelong learning. Value for money judgements are equally difficult to make.