



**LEARNING TO PROGRESS?  
REFLECTIONS ON  
EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS  
AND EXPERIENCE OF  
UNION-LED LEARNING**

**Making Bad Jobs Better**

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# OVERVIEW

- Investing in skills to escape bad jobs?
  - Government policy
  - Union policy and priorities
  - Individual aspirations and expectations
- Evidence – does learning offer a route out of bad jobs?
- Case studies of learning and career progression
- Research, policy and practice issues...



## BODY OF WORK ON UNION-LED LEARNING

- Evaluation of the Scottish Union Learning Fund 2006 (Findlay, Warhurst, Stewart and Dutton)
- Learning to Organise and Organising to Learn? (Warhurst, Findlay and Thompson, 2006)
- Estimating the demand for union-led learning 2007 (Findlay, Findlay and Warhurst)
- Evaluating the ESF Learning and Development funds in Scotland 2010-11 (Stewart and Findlay)
- Skills utilisation case studies (ongoing) (Findlay, Commander and Warhurst)



# SKILLS POLICY

- Skills development and (accredited) learning as policy solution to bad jobs (and a host of other social and economic ills...)
- Improving the supply of skills benefits individuals, employers and the economy
- How to engage people in learning and skills enhancement
- Implicit assumption – higher skills->improved performance -> higher incomes->better organisational performance
- Growing academic critique in recent years
  - Responsibility for bad jobs
  - Low demand by employers for skills at point of use (Keep and Mayhew 2010)



# UNION-LED LEARNING

- Union exclusion from training/skills policy involvement pre-1997
- Skills and learning as an emerging union priority
- Experience of particular unions in supporting activist and members' skills and training needs
- 1998 on: ULF in England and Wales
- 2000 on: SULF in Scotland
- Statutory underpinning of union learning representatives from 2002



# UNION-LED LEARNING AND BAD JOBS

- Low/no skill workers
- Training gap inside the workplace
- Learning gap outside of the workplace
- Importance of union reach to non-traditional learners (Warner 2000)
- Successes of union-led learning: for employees (and workers), employers and unions



# INDIVIDUAL DEMAND FOR LEARNING

- SULF evaluation
  - Significant take up of learning – often oversubscribed
  - Variety of types of learning: personal development, job related, employability
  - Unions reported significant demand for learning to improve labour market/career prospects
- But little detailed info on learner demand



# LEARNING DEMAND RESEARCH

- What learning do workers want?
- Why do they want it?
- CATI survey of 750 people employed in establishments with a union presence
- Sampling targets relating to sex and age
- 18 closed and two open questions
- Postal survey of 200 ULRs in Scotland – 25% response rate



## LD RESULTS

- 35% intended to undertake learning; 21% might undertake learning
- Reinforced by ULR data
- ULRs – majority could double current numbers of learners with sufficient resources
- large and so far unmet demand for learning
- Strong indication of intention to learn among temporary workers



# WHO WANTED TO LEARN, AND WHY

- No sex or dependents impact
- Positive age impact up to 50
- Learning begets learning
- 1/3 of lower income group (earning less than national average income) wanted to learn – but lowest income groups report lower intention to learn than those with average incomes
- Strong intention to learn among temporary workers (but low participation in ULL) – learning to obtain more secure employment?



## LEARNING WHAT?

- Wide range of learning
- Most frequent – IT/computing skills – for youngest and oldest age bands, and particularly for those with lowest qualifications
- Least frequent – basic (literacy and numeracy) skills
- Health, medical and care related skills
- Craft skills
- Health and safety training
- Financial, accounting and legal skills
- Hospitality skills
- Physical activity/leisure related skills



## WHY LEARN?

- 43% - to progress in current job – especially among 35-49 year olds
- 32% - to develop in career/profession
- 15% - personal interest or enjoyment (least likely in 25-34 age band)
- Therefore, emphasis on employment related skills – consistent with Felstead et al 2007
- perceived relationship between learning and career/earnings progression



## LD CONCLUSION

- Lots of demand, and demand to improve employment/career
- But, risk that ULL could exacerbate learning divide (implications for targeting ULL)
- But, also – double frustration – continued (and differential) access to learning, and will learning deliver?



# DOES LEARNING OFFER AN ESCAPE FROM BAD JOBS?

- High returns to academic qualifications; substantial returns to higher level vocational qualifications (Jenkins et al 2007)
- Blundell et al 2003 – salary uplift of 15% for VQs up to level 2
- Average returns to lower level qualifications low, non-existent... or negative! (Deardon et al 2004, Jenkins et al 2007, Felstead 2007, Keep 2008, Demos 2011)
- But... positive returns to VQs for some sub groups and some sectors



## LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING EVIDENCE BASE

“Economic analyses of individuals’ wages and employment prospects can only go so far in telling us why such qualifications do have positive economic value in some settings but do not in others. To truly understand why, for example, NVQs in public administration for women yield a positive marginal wage return, we really need to understand how such qualifications are used in practice...we therefore recommend further qualitative research....” Jenkins et al 2007



# ULL IMPACT ON PAY AND PROGRESSION

- Stuart et al 2011 evaluation of ULF 8-11
  - 14% of learners reported that learning had contributed to a better and more interesting job
  - 12% had changed job after learning (most within their own organisation)
  - 8% of learners (half job changers) reported wage increases after learning (16% in previous ULF evaluation)
  - Wage increases more common for women, minority ethnic workers, workers under 40
- ESF evaluation (ongoing, Stewart and Findlay) – 10% of workers reported pay increases following learning



## CASE 1 – UNISON/HEALTHORG

- NHS trust, SE England – centred on one hospital
- Case study: interviews and focus groups with learners, union officers and project workers, ULRs and managers
- Cleaners and health care assistants, many with little/no qualifications
- Focus on progression – into supervisory positions and other healthcare occupations



- Learning escalator – personal development to job related learning to vocational qualifications and beyond
- Jobs escalator – starts with re-entry to learning through ULL and proceeds to staff promotion within the NHS
- Benefits for individuals – better jobs, better career prospects, higher income
- Benefits for the employer – aids recruitment and retention, branding and employee relations
- Benefits for union – significantly increased membership and activism



“What it does is to open up opportunities for people and one of the things we’ve been able to do is encourage people from all sorts of backgrounds, mostly health care support workers, they’ve done the NVQ and then we’ve been able to actually sponsor them into some pre-registration nurse training and then through that qualification as well... they are super, they know the job inside out, they know all the conditions really well, they make super nurses (NHS training and development manager)



“If you want to go to another pay band then you need to educate yourself to a certain level in order to do that”  
(Unison ULR)

“You’ve got to look at this over the long term. I mean, I’ve done my NVQ which took me a year and a half. I’m now about to go to university to do my foundation degree in podiatry...that will take another 5 years. So to get me to the top from where I was in the beginning is like 6 or 7 years. So you can’t see the difference straight away”  
(health care support worker).



# HEALTHORG – KEY SUPPORTS

- Well-developed job specifications and career requirements arising from Agenda for Change
- Well developed internal labour market
- Value placed on org specific knowledge
- Ability to use ILAs collectively to support ULL alongside ULF
- Constructive engagement between ULRs, unions and management



# CASES 2 AND 3: UNITE/ENGCO1 AND ENGCO2

- Unite/2 large engineering firms in Scotland
- Ongoing pathways programmes for developing shop floor workers at different levels
- Union instigation and design
- Ranges from personal development skills through to degree programmes
- Close co-operation with FE/HE
- examples



- Clear perception of learning as an issue of terms and conditions and hence a collective bargaining issue
  - Language of equality of opportunity for non-traditional learners
  - Strong emphasis on employer benefits – hence need for employer contribution
  - Heavy emphasis on learners staying in sector and with same employer
  - Role of union in building management support - eg creation of briefing packs for line managers
  - Similar programmes being rolled out in other sectors
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# WHAT ENHANCES THE LEARNING/PROGRESSION LINK?

- Unions involved not just in design and delivery of learning, but also in what happens after the learning ... tricky in parts
- Internal labour markets
- Regulated jobs/occupations
- Direct employer contribution – encourages development/better deployment of people who have undertaken learning



## RESEARCH AND POLICY ISSUES

- Need for rigorous longitudinal studies of learner careers (especially serial learners)
- Need for better workplace level data on learning and progression
- Some evidence of employer/organisational benefits – which may not be passed on to learners
- Development of ULL needs to go beyond supporting the acquisition of skills
- How best to support unions to focus on learning that makes a difference



# RESEARCH AND POLICY ISSUES ARISING (CONT)

- Significant union capacity/expertise issues
- Consistent with Keep and Mayhew – potential of stronger social partnership around workplace skills agendas
- Creates bridge between learning and skills utilisation debates and policies
- Implications for researchers and research collaboration (Payne 2010)

