

Institution: University of Leeds
Unit of Assessment: C19 Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: Improving workforce performance through workforce (union-led) engagement in the design of training and development
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>A persistent issue in UK government and policy has been national performance on development and improvement of workforce skills for international competitiveness, highlighted by <i>The Learning Age</i> (1998) and the Lisbon Agenda. Strengthening and alignment of workplace dialogue have been shown to lead to better understanding between those designing and those receiving training and development programmes. This case shows how research part-funded by trade unions has contributed to directly and indirectly shaping policy, leading to further funding targeted at changes in support by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The result is improved performance in learning and training.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Conducted by the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation & Change (CERIC), led by Professor Mark Stuart (Director) (at LUBS since 1992), and including Chris Forde, Ian Greenwood, Andrew Robinson, Jo Cutter, Hugh Cook and Emma Wallis, this research has contributed to the policy agenda on skills and training. The research started in the mid-1990s, with an examination of the joint dialogue in training in the UK printing industry, observing difficulties in developing effective collaboration on skill formation in a policy climate with minimal regulation and employer constraint [1]. Little was then known about 'learning partnerships' or 'constituent elements of success'.</p> <p>An EU 5th Framework Programme (€1.2m, 2001) [i] examined and compared, across seven countries, how learning partnerships could help organisations in the steel/metal industry adapt to restructuring. A comparative typology of learning partnerships was published in <i>European Journal of Industrial Relations</i> (2007) [2]. Another study, funded by Campaign for Learning (CFL) [ii], explored the success factors associated with 'raising the demand for learning' among low-skilled employee groups in seven large organisations. This early work found that the success of learning partnerships, and workforce demand for learning, were influenced by the learning roles and structures developed by trade unions and levels of workplace dialogue around learning [3].</p> <p>The second phase (2002–9) examined these findings further via specific UK developments in union-led learning and company engagement with employees on learning. A regional survey (for the Yorkshire and Humberside Trades Union Congress – TUC) [iii] of union learning representatives (ULRs) led to a publication in <i>Work, Employment and Society</i> (2005) [4]. The survey found that ULRs can raise employee demand for learning, conditional on wider company and union strategies. This issue was examined in further TUC research looking at how the union role can contribute to a more effective workplace learning culture and higher levels of training investment. This led to four influential TUC reports (e.g. 2007 Unionlearn Research Papers¹ 3, <i>A collective learning culture</i> and 4, <i>Training, union recognition and collective bargaining</i>).</p> <p>The Leitch Review confirmed unions could contribute to workplace learning, and CERIC won two tenders for work on collective learning funds [iv] [v], leading to an advisory role for Stuart at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and another Unionlearn Research Paper (13), <i>Co-investing in workforce development</i> (2011). In 2007, BIS's predecessor commissioned CERIC to undertake 12 headline case studies exploring best practice [vi] [5], resulting in a guidance document for UK employers.</p> <p>The third research phase (2009 onwards) has involved more large-scale evaluations of the impact of union learning (and the Union Learning Fund (ULF)) on unions, employees and employers, and its sustainability [vii] [viii] [ix]^{2,3}. BIS asked Stuart to look at ULF's management information systems and data recording, in order to change the funding regime and set the basis for a regular employer and employee survey, based on instruments designed by Stuart. His argument for more rigour in methodological evaluation led to an employer survey [vii], presented at the TUC 2010 Unionlearn conference (400 delegates) and cited by Rt. Hon. Dr. Vince Cable, MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. A major review article on CERIC's expertise was</p>

published in *Work, Employment and Society* [6], with a quantitative publication on the mutual gains of union learning in *Economic and Industrial Democracy* [5].

¹ <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/about/research-into-union-learning> [accessed 17.10.13]

² **Stuart, M.** and Rees, J. (2009) *Evaluation of Stage 2 of the Collective Learning Fund Project, Working paper No 3*. London: TUC Unionlearn. pp107.

³ **Stuart, M., Cook, H., Cutter, J.** and Winterton, J. (2010) *Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund and Unionlearn*. London: Unionlearn

3. References to the research

Peer-reviewed journal articles

- [1] **Stuart, M.**, (1996), 'The industrial relations of training: a reconsideration of training arrangements', *Industrial Relations Journal*, Volume 27 (3), 253–265, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2338.1996.tb00773.x
- [2] **Stuart, M.** and Wallis, E., (2007), 'Partnership-based approaches to learning in the context of restructuring: a seven-country study on trade union innovation', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Volume 13 (3), 301–321, doi: 10.1177/0959680107081743
- [3] **Stuart, M.**, (2007), 'The industrial relations of learning and training: a new consensus or new politics?', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Volume 13 (3), 269–280, doi: 10.1177/0959680107081741
- [4] Wallis, E., **Stuart, M.** and Greenwood, I., (2005), "“Learners of the workplace unite!” An empirical examination of the trade union learning representative initiative", *Work, Employment and Society*, Volume 19 (2), 283–304, doi: 10.1177/0950017005053174
- [5] **Stuart, M., Cutter, J., Cook, H.** and Winterton, J., (2013), 'Who stands to gain from union-led learning in Britain? Evidence from surveys of learners, union officers and employers', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Volume 32 (2), 227-246, doi: 10.1177/0143831X12442579
- [6] Rainbird, H. and **Stuart, M.**, (2011), 'The state and the union learning agenda in Britain', *Work, Employment and Society*, Volume 25 (2), 202–217, doi: 10.1177/09500170111398893

Research income

- [i] **Stuart, M.**, (2001-05) 'Learning in Partnership: Responding to the Restructuring of the European Steel and Metal Sectors' (Learnpartner), *European Union: FP5 – socio-economic research key action*. **€1,200,000** (plus €250,000 match funding), Principal Applicant and Project Co-ordinator. The project included eight research partners, from seven countries.
- [ii] **Stuart, M.**, (2002-05), 'Raising the Demand for Learning', *European Union: Equal Programme*. **€96,960** – This was a £2.6 million project, co-ordinated by the CFL.
- [iii] **Stuart, M., Wallis, E.** and Greenwood, I., (2002-03), 'Investigation of Trade Union Learning Representative initiative', *Trade Union Congress: Learning Services*. **£16,683**
- [iv] **Stuart, M.** and Wallis, E., (2007), 'Collective Learning Fund Pilot Evaluation Phase 1', *Trade Union Congress Unionlearn*. **£9,975**
- [v] **Stuart, M.**, (2008), 'Evaluation of Collective Learning Fund: Phase 2', *Unionlearn*. **£23,000**
- [vi] **Stuart, M., Forde, C.** and Cutter, J., (2007), 'Encouraging Workplace Dialogue on Training and Skills – Case Studies', Funded by *Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform* for BERR/TUC/CBI/DIUS Joint Working Group. **£14,824**
- [vii] **Stuart, M.**, (2009), 'Evaluation of Unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund', *Unionlearn/DIUS*. **£161,000**
- [viii] BIS, Commissioned evaluation of Union Learning Fund with specific reference to Management Information Systems (in association with Institute for Employment Studies), (2012), total funding £110,000 of which **£42,000** to LUBS
- [ix] **Stuart, M., Cutter, J.** and **Cook, H.**, (2012), 'The sustainability of Unionlearn and employment engagement', *Trade Union Congress Unionlearn*. **£35,000** and subsequently increased to **£85,000** to collate data on the impact of Unionlearn on employer organisations

4. Details of the impact

The research has made a substantial and sustained contribution to decision-making and policy in workforce dialogue on training, skills development and union learning. **Stuart** has presented to the Advisory and Steering Groups of Unionlearn, and other national and international union and policy

Impact case study (REF3b)

bodies (e.g., Skills Australia [A]). The team has contributed to the development of workplace learning and policy in three key areas.

Impacts on the TUC and other Unions

Unions need to integrate learning into their policies and systems, for example through rule books, branch structures and union roles, so enhancing the demand for improved provision of training opportunities, especially for low-paid/low-skilled workers. Here, there is no simple, linear means of impact – change takes place progressively, through the presentation of expert evidence. CERIC's evidence base and presentations (e.g., at the annual Unions 21 conference in 2008, at a TUC annual-conference fringe event, 2010 and at the Unionlearn Annual Conference, 2011) [B] has had a measurable and 'major impact on TUC policy on skills' (TUC Unionlearn Director) [C]. It is frequently included in Unionlearn's policy/guidance publications, dedicated toolkits and has thus contributed to dialogue within unions on learning and the training of union learning representatives.

The benefits of the evidence gathered has gone beyond the TUC-Government policy relations as it has shaped how individual unions act with regard to employee learning, e.g. proactively promoting learning and evaluating the training provided. Approximately 230,000 people per year benefit from the training opportunities provided by Unionlearn and without union encouragement many of these workers would be either reluctant or unable to access learning [B]. The Chief Executive of the Campaign for Learning provides evidence that the EU EQUAL research (iv) helped with their relations with government, employers, trade unions and other stakeholders in the UK learning and skills arena and comments that the thinking and research: "have been core features of the subsequent design of some of our major programmes – notably...the annual Learning at Work Day....that supports over 5,000 workplaces a year to hold learning events" [D].

The recent evaluation, BIS grant (viii), identified the need for the TUC to pay more attention to data collection, storage and monitoring¹. As the TUC Unionlearn Director confirmed, 'The process of working with CERIC helped Unionlearn improve the quality of internal evidence-gathering, both quantitative and qualitative. That process has now become embedded and has been enormously helpful to improving our flow of internal MI [management information] and using it to improve outcomes.' This has included the creation of several new posts at the TUC [C].

Impacts on government and policy

Strong and institutionalised learning partnerships can benefit individual employees and organisations. The analysis of WERS 2004 showed the positive impact of collective bargaining on training outcomes. From 2007 onwards, the TUC used this argument to encourage government to increase support for collective bargaining with employers on training. This was largely rejected by the former government, but did encourage the joint working group that explored the wider benefits of workforce dialogue on training and skills; its joint statement has been widely cited.

CERIC research is used by Unionlearn in their day-to-day engagement with government policy makers. It shapes and informs discussions in this area; and helps set the agenda. The research provides hard objective evidence on which to base arguments. Recently and significantly, the CERIC employer survey demonstrated that employers favoured working with unions on learning and training. Citing wide-ranging contributions to organisational learning practices and outcomes, this work was mentioned by Rt. Hon. Dr. Vince Cable MP as important in showing how union learning can contribute widely to UK PLC [E] and was covered in an article in *The Independent* [F]. Dr. Cable commented: "An evaluation by Leeds University shows that of 80 per cent of people on Unionlearn projects said they got good value, but also two-thirds of employers said they were extremely useful for their businesses; and I think that is a very good story" [E]. The study was also used by the American Society of Training and Development [G] and has been used extensively by the TUC (in dissemination and deliberations with the CBI) and by government departments [H] and [I]. The TUC submitted the evaluation findings to BIS as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and these contributed to the ongoing funding of Unionlearn (despite major cuts in public spending): 'Evidence, generated by a detailed and rigorous study of over 400 employers with over one million employees was the first large-scale, high-quality study of impact. It was subjected to intense scrutiny by experts from the Treasury and BIS, who were impressed by its findings of substantial employer support and major impact in terms of both learning and wider productivity outcomes. The study undoubtedly played a major part in persuading the incoming coalition

government to continue the £21.5 million BIS funding for Unionlearn' (Unionlearn Director) [C]. In the Foreword to the Annual Unionlearn Conference Report 2011, the Chair comments: "The core grant to Unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund, however, was not reduced. This reflects the cross-party support for union learning and recognition of its positive impact as evidenced by the in-depth evaluation carried out by Leeds University Business School" [B].

The Director of Unionlearn further confirms that "CERIC's work has had a major impact on TUC policy on skills. This in turn has impacted on BIS and UKCES national skills policy, not least through the work of the four union commissioners on UKCES but also in the close engagement which Unionlearn has with BIS and other national agencies' (Unionlearn Director) [C].

Impacts on business and organisations

The research contributed to policy debates on raising the demand for workplace learning, particularly among low-skilled workers, and how workplace dialogue can contribute to this – as evidenced in policy reports published by the CFL, invitations to speak to policy bodies such as Skills Australia, and involvement in consultations (e.g. by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills) [J]. CERIC research has also 'helped unions and Unionlearn to better understand the drivers of employer and employee engagement and workforce development' (Unionlearn Director). This has influenced arguments by the TUC that 'there is a great deal of scope for both hard and soft levers to drive up employer engagement (e.g. on apprenticeships)'. It has also impacted the joint work between unions and employers, through Unionlearn policy, which has 'resulted in a much wider approach to development, including more emphasis on issues such as CPD, higher learning, employee development, skill utilisation, particular needs of disadvantaged workers and different sectoral needs' [D]. CERIC research on co-investment and collective learning funds (CLFs) has been used in a number of ways, according to a senior policy officer: "informing the advice that we give to trade unions when designing their strategies for strategic engagement and approach to dialogue with employers and other partners around workplace learning" [K].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [A] Skills Australia Annual Report (2009-10), Page 22 confirms Stuart's presentation on individual demand for learning and workplace dialogue over skills and training from a UK perspective
- [B] Unionlearn Annual Conference report 2011. Forward by Mary Bousted acknowledges evidence provided by Leeds University Business School in protecting core funding
- [C] Letter of testimony from the Director of Unionlearn, TUC (September 2012)
- [D] Letter of testimony from the Chief Executive, Campaign for Learning
- [E] Unionlearn press release, (July 2010) 'Unions to play greater role in Government's skills agenda, says Vince Cable', <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk>, (download 24.10.13)
- [F] Mathews, V. (2010) 'A second opportunity to learn benefits employees and employers'. *The Independent*. 25/3/2010. <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/career-planning/getting-job/a-second-opportunity-to-learn-benefits-employees-and-employers-1926609.html> (26/06/13)
- [G] Pace, Ann. (2010) 'Union led learning: A Success Story for the UK'. *American Society for Training and Development* <http://www.astd.org/TD/Archives/2010/Jul/Free/1007Intelligence.htm> (see second article on page) (download 26.09.13)
- [H] BERR (July 2008) *It's time to talk training: How to develop a dialogue on skills at the workplace – Guidance on Good Practice from the CBI, TUC, BERR and DIUS*. London: BERR. (With forward signed by two secretaries of state, CBI director general and TUC general secretary) <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file47079.pdf> (download 26.09.13)
- [I] Hansard citations: (download 15.11.11): <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110304/text/110304w0004.htm> (3/11); and written Lords answers: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/110210w0001.htm> (2/11)
- [J] Director of Unionlearn, (26.05.10) *Unions and Engagement*. Involvement & Participation Association: <http://www.ipa-involve.com/news/unions-and-engagement/> (download 26.09.13)
- [K] Letter of testimony from Senior Policy Office, Unionlearn, TUC (October 2013)