

Institution: University of Strathclyde
Unit of Assessment: Sub-panel 19 – Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: Supporting the funding and delivery of union-led learning services that widen educational access and benefit learners, unions and employers
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research on unions and workplace learning has informed government and unions on the effectiveness and distinctiveness of union-led learning (ULL) in promoting adult learning and skills. On the basis of the research, the then Scottish Executive decided to provide funding for union-led learning from 2008 to 2011. The research findings have also contributed to priority setting for union learning funds, notably by directing funding towards the longer-term sustainability of ULL across Scotland, benefitting adult and particularly non-traditional adult learners. The research has also impacted on trade union policy on workplace learning and skills by informing strategic deliberations about how unions can generate member and union benefits from learning activities. It has also influenced union and employers' practices by linking skills acquisition and deployment, leading to improved working practices that benefit employers, employees and unions. Moreover, the evaluation framework developed in this research has informed approaches to evaluating ULL elsewhere in the UK, and robust evaluations using the framework have generated additional funds for learners in England at a time when other funding for adult learning has diminished.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This research explores how unions engage with learning and skills within workplaces and how they contribute to related public policy. Comprising a series of linked projects, it focused on why and how unions engage in workplace learning, skills and skills deployment, and with what success. The work on union-led learning (ULL) began in 2005 when the (then) Scottish Executive (SE) commissioned Findlay and Warhurst to evaluate the first five rounds of the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF) [1]. This report provided the first systematic evaluation of ULL in the UK. The research established a new evaluation framework: SPICE – sustainability, performance, inclusion, capacity and employability. Sustainability referred to the extension of workplace learning beyond the period of public funding; performance focused on how ULL benefitted firms; inclusion referred to the contribution of ULL to social inclusion; capacity-building referred to the ability of unions to deliver additional workplace learning; and employability focused on the impacts of ULL for workers. This was the first systematic evaluation framework to be developed around ULL, which highlighted the need for all stakeholders to benefit in order for ULL to be sustainable into the future. The research findings [1] indicated that unions were using SULF for its intended purpose of delivering additional workplace learning; that ULL met significant demand for workplace learning especially among non-traditional learners; that learning was stimulated by unions' unique workplace relationships; that ULL was supported by employers and policy makers; that unions generated quantifiable learning outcomes and leveraged additional funding for learning from employers. The findings also indicated that unions, distinct from union members, needed to benefit from engagement with learning and were doing so, though data on this was more limited [2]. The evaluation report recommended the continued provision of public funding for ULL; that this provision should be extended geographically; and advised on how learning should be embedded in workplaces and in union structures in order to ensure sustainability [1].</p> <p>The original SULF evaluation led to two subsequent research projects, one knowledge transfer partnership and one consultancy project [6]. The first research project focussed on measuring the demand for workplace learning in Scotland and provided – for the first time - robust indicators of current and latent demand for workplace learning in Scotland [3]. Respondents in the research reported greater willingness to undertake learning where workplace advice and encouragement were available, where learning was workplace-based and where unions were involved in learning. Union learning activity was also reported as likely to stimulate further demand for learning, increasing the significance of the role of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) [4]. In 2010, the relationships built with key stakeholders around the SULF evaluation led to a successful two year KTP between Findlay/Strathclyde and STUC. The KTP involved developing union learning research capacity and networks, addressing in practical terms the need for sustainability in ULL</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

identified in the original research. In 2011, Scottish Union Learning (SUL) commissioned action research to examine how ULL might be deployed in workplaces to generate improved skills utilisation. The research found that effective skills utilisation could be driven by business requirements and supported by learning and skills development, but required workers interested in skills utilisation and organisational cultures and management styles centred on communication [6]. Importantly, like ULL, effective skills utilisation could generate mutual gains for stakeholders. The benefits experienced by three case study firms [5] were outlined in a DVD that has been circulated to ULRs across Scotland to support more effective skills utilisation and has influenced subsequent union-led learning projects.

Key researchers have been Prof. Patricia Findlay (University of Edinburgh 2005-2010, University of Strathclyde 2010-present) and Prof. Chris Warhurst (University of Strathclyde 2004-2011, University of Sydney 2011-present)

3. References to the research

1. Findlay, P. Stewart, R., Dutton, E. and Warhurst, C. (2006) Evaluation of the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF) (2000-2005), Glasgow: Scottish Executive, <http://scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/05/23131735/0>.
2. Findlay, P. and Warhurst, C. (2011) 'Union learning funds and trade union revitalization: a new tool in the toolkit?', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 49: S1, pp.115-134. (ABS 4*)
3. Findlay, J., Findlay, P. and Warhurst, C. (2007) Estimating the Demand for Union-Led Learning in Scotland (2007), union learn research paper 6, London: STUC/TUC. Available at <http://issuu.com/unionlearn/docs/research-paper-6/1?e=0>
4. Findlay, J., Findlay, P. and Warhurst, C. (2012) 'What every worker wants? Evidence about employee demand for learning', *British Education Research Journal*, 38:3, pp. 515-532. (ABS 3*)
5. Findlay, P. Warhurst, C. and Commander, J. (2011) *The Role of Trade Unions in Effective Skills Utilisation: Three Scottish Case Studies*, Glasgow: SUL/STUC.
6. Warhurst, C. and Findlay, P. (2011) *More effective skills utilisation: The shifting terrain/shifting the terrain of skills policy in Scotland*, report for Skills Development Scotland.

A total of five projects funded by the Scottish Executive (2005-6, £64,000); STUC (2007. £21,000); SDS (2010, £4000); Technology Strategy Board (2010-12, £91,212/44,925); and STUC/SUL (2011, £17000) underpin these outputs.

4. Details of the impact

Throughout this research, extensive dissemination of the research findings has taken place via publications, presentations, conferences and workshops, and to distinct stakeholder groups.

Impact on the (then) Scottish Executive:

The evaluation derived from the Strathclyde research influenced the subsequent development of the Scottish Union Learning Fund. SULF Round 7 (2008-11) highlights how successfully ULL engages with non-traditional learners (reflecting the main conclusion of the evaluation): "Unions have a crucial part to play in developing the skills of their members too – especially when it comes to reaching out to those people who employers struggle to reach" (Fiona Hislop, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, 2008). The SULF 7 funding call implemented the evaluation's key recommendations "... *In this Round there will be a focus on sustainability, new bidding unions and projects based in the Highlands and Islands*" (Sources 1 and 6). As Grahame Smith of the STUC (Source 1) notes, "*The prospectus for SULF 7 ... included a specific requirement, arising from the SULF 1-5 Evaluation recommendations, that the union learning funds would prioritise activity by unions not previously involved, would focus on sustainability, and on activity in the Highlands and Islands.....[the research] has given ... the Scottish Government but also colleges and employers, the confidence that the investment in both the union learning infrastructure and in the knowledge and skills of workers has had a significant impact.*"

Impact on STUC

The evaluation was complemented by the learning demand research which in turn supported STUC in making an effective case for government funding to establish SUL in 2008. This funding, along with additional learning project funding, amounted to £2.4M over 3 years. This benefitted STUC by delivering a dedicated learning organisation comprising 10 staff to support STUC's ambition to become a major player in Scotland's skills and learning policy. As SUL's website

(Source 10) notes, the Scottish Government's substantial investment in establishing SUL is recognition of the contribution that unions have made to improve the quality and quantity of learning available at Scottish workplaces. The research discussed here quantified and analysed the quantity and quality of that learning and was important in establishing a case for SU: "[The research] fundamentally influenced the strategic direction of union learning in Scotland. It provided confirmation of the effectiveness of the Fund and led to a significant adjustment in our strategic approach. [It] directly resulted in the creation of a dedicated and coordinated resources within the STUC (the STUC Skills and Lifelong Learning Team ...) to complement the existing union infrastructure, principally workplace Union Learning Representatives, and to the development of a discrete and union managed fund to support learning provision" (Source 1). The learning demand research enhanced the impact of the earlier SULF evaluation and "... provided for the first time an assessment of the level of demand for learning in unionised workplaces in Scotland and the type of learning demanded. This research was crucial in persuading the Scottish Government to invest in the STUC's leaning infrastructure (the STUC Skills and Lifelong Learning Team/ Scottish Union Learning) and provided the evidence that underpinned the criteria for the SUL Learning Fund created in 2010 and funded through the European Social Fund." (Source 1).

Impact on SUL:

The SULF evaluation and subsequent research highlighted the need for sustainability in union learning activities. To support such sustainability, the aforementioned KTP project aimed to build a knowledge management system to support the strategic development of union-led learning in Scotland. The purpose of this partnership was to underpin a step change in union learning activity and brought with it consequent funding and reputational benefits. As Sylvia O'Grady, SUL manager has reported, "the KTP project enabled STUC and SUL to optimise, store and access tacit knowledge and use it in order to respond to the demands of unions and government, particularly in making cases for funding and learning activity" (Source 2). She states that the KTP also helped in "successfully effecting organisational change, and allowed STUC/SUL to establish the business case for continued government funding and enhanced the range of activities delivered" (Source 2). More importantly, in her view, the KTP project enabled STUC/SUL to be the leading organisation in Scotland involved in improving the way skills are used in the workplace.

Impact on support for non-traditional learners:

The original research provided evidence that unions were particularly successful in attracting non-traditional learners back into learning. The unions' distinctive contribution in engaging those otherwise excluded from learning in later life (many of whom had negative experiences of learning earlier in life) has been accepted by government and has been important in securing on-going government support for union-led learning. "The evidence base provided by the research has determined the priorities we have set for the application of learning funds, both by directing funding towards the longer-term sustainability of union led learning across Scotland, and benefitting adult and particularly non-traditional adult learners". (Source 1)

Impact on unions and members:

The evaluation indicated that ULL was only sustainable if all key stakeholder groups benefitted from it and that unions needed to benefit directly as institutions as well as indirectly through benefits to their members. The evaluation recommended 'mainstreaming' of learning activities in unions and that unions should make learning more sustainable in the short to medium term. The evaluation also encouraged unions to link learning with organising strategies. Both of these recommendations have been taken on board by many unions: "A considerable challenge for unions has been integrating (or 'mainstreaming') union-led learning into their 'core business'. The finding of the research that union-led learning is only sustainable if unions acquire benefit directly as institutions as well as indirectly through benefits to their members, has been key to encouraging many unions to amend their strategic priorities to make learning more sustainable in the short to medium term and to link learning with organising strategies". (Source 1).

Impact on employers:

The learning evaluation and subsequent learning and skills deployment research focussed on how unions, employers and employees might enhance skills utilisation. In action research cases, the

Impact case study (REF3b)

researchers worked with employers, employees and unions to effect changes in working practice and provide business and employee benefits through development of e.g. new HR practice and new business activity (Source 3). The former has enhanced HR development and improved employee access to new work areas. The latter has produced direct cost savings (through reusing white goods) and indirect savings on landfill costs (Source 3). Beyond the clear benefits to the case companies, dissemination over 2011 and 2012 through reports, a DVD, a conference, presentations and workshop materials engaged union and employer interest, resulting in greater emphasis on using skills effectively in bids to SUL/Scottish Government for funding in 2012 (Source 9). As Susan Cassidy of Communitas points out (Source 5): *“The legacy...has been in the strategic development of the work Community and Communitas do around learning and skills in Scotland. In particular, our experience in engaging with RSBi, forming a Joint Learning Committee and organising workplace learning with a skills utilisation objective, has been invaluable in the evolution of our learning strategy in Scotland. A practical example is the work we are currently undertaking within Tata Steel ... around skills utilisation regarding the use of digital technology within two major steel plants. This initiative will cover the entire workforce, within two steel plants in Lanarkshire. Without our previous experience with Professor Findlay, undertaking this initiative within Tata Steel would have been significantly more challenging...it also had a major contribution in developing a future strategy in terms of working with employers in an innovative and progressive way.”*

Impact on policy community:

In 2012, the issue of effective skills utilisation became a prominent policy concern in Scotland, and this research has made a significant contribution to the debate through the production of a Paper on Skills Utilisation for Skills in Focus Series (with Warhurst) and a presentation to high level policy, public agency and workplace stakeholders at an invitation-only Skills Committee seminar in that year. The value of this work to employers, employees and the policy community has been acknowledged by Paul McKelvie OBE, Chair of the Joint Skills Committee and SDS board member (source 7), and has been endorsed in SDS's submissions to the Scottish Funding Council (source 8).

Impact on rUK:

The evaluation framework (SPICE) used in this research impacted on the conduct of evaluations of union-led learning elsewhere in the UK and became the template for the evaluation of the Union Learning fund in England and Wales in 2010, which incorporated the SULF SPICE framework. As Bert Clough of Unionlearn explains: *“The evaluation of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) Rounds 8 - 11 and Unionlearn undertaken in 2010 was underpinned by the framework which built on the five-level SPICE ... framework developed for the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF)... Although SULF is smaller scale than ULF, the TUC felt that given the robustness of the evaluation the framework would act as an appropriate and effective assessment of the additionality and the contribution ULF made to union-led learning in England..... The inclusion of these dimensions ... led to a comprehensive evaluation of ULF. The evaluation provided evidence of significant added value which led to the continuance of the level of ULF funding by the Coalition Government at a time when the further education budget was cut by 25 %.”* (Source 4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. A statement from the General Secretary, STUC.
2. A statement from the Manager, SUL.
3. A statement from the Training Manager, Blindcraft Ltd.
4. A statement from the Research and Strategy Manager Unionlearn/TUC.
5. A statement from the Project Officer, Communitas.
6. SULF7 Prospectus, Scottish Government.
7. http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/321723/skills_in_focus_-_skills_utilisation_in_scotland_june_2012.pdf
8. http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/CMP_SkillsCommittee26October2012_26102012/SC_12_23_Skills_Utilisation_Report.pdf
9. <http://www.scottishunionlearning.com/support/skills-utilisation-project>
10. <http://www.scottishunionlearning.com/support/about-us>