

unionlearn

with the South West TUC



Learning in union

Five case studies showing why Train to Gain is an essential tool for trade unions working with providers and employers at work.

Train to
Gain 

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Learning in union



Train to Gain is an essential tool for trade unions working with providers and employers at work. Unions have been

involved with the Employer Training Pilots that were the forerunners of Train to Gain and the following case studies show the benefits that the union - provider – employer partnership can bring to all parties.

Unions want to work with partners to bring a holistic approach to learning, to ensure all employees benefit from learning at work. Unions are also in this for the long haul, and strive to create sustainable partnerships that continue well beyond initial work. The aim is to create a culture of learning in workplaces across the South West.

You will see examples from a range of employers across the region, including small businesses, manufacturing and the marine sector. Working with providers on Train to Gain has brought benefits

to these companies and to union members and has led to the development of new and different learning.

Unionlearn has worked closely with providers over the years and has developed agreements and the Quality Award with a growing number. This is of real benefit to unions, who can be assured of their needs being met and developing a productive partnership. An example of this with Filton College is included in the case studies and shows the effectiveness of this work.

Train to Gain is more than working with the brokerage service. It is about joined-up working with providers, brokers and unions to benefit employees and employers. Its key aim is to create meaningful learning that benefits the majority of staff – the whole organisational approach. Unions exist to bring real skills and benefits to members, and to make a difference to their lives.

Helen Cole
unionlearn Regional Manager

“It is about joined-up working with providers, brokers and unions to benefit employees and employers.”

A shining light

Train To Gain funding has led to a waiting list to learn at one Dorset company. **Tim Lezard** finds out why.

Tutor Kathryn Paine was introduced to Dextra by unionlearn Project Worker Beverly Allen and can't get enough of learners at Dextra Group plc.

Kathryn, who works for New College, Swindon, and is a tutor for unionlearn's U-Net Service, teaches one day a week at the Gillingham-based manufacturers, but her courses are proving so popular she's going to double her time.

"The Skills for Life courses are popular because they're so comprehensive and because they're free," she nods.

"If you want to do the courses privately, you'd have to pay way over £1,000, but with Train To Gain, if you qualify, then you get it free."

The courses' popularity comes as no surprise to Dextra's HR Manager Kay Gill.

"It's a good opportunity for the staff here to re-train and get some new qualifications," she says. "We got involved with Train To Gain through Community, the union here at Dextra, which pulls in the funding for us.

"At the moment we're restricted to 15 learners because Kathryn only comes in once a week, but we are extending

that to do two days a week, so we will be offering it to more students.

"People are very keen to learn – we have a waiting list of people wanting to get on the course. You can see that people on the course gain in confidence and improve their ability in the workplace."

One learner who has gained from his IT course is Nikos Tsenkos, who works as a packer and an assembler in the warehouse.

"I got involved for a better future," he says. "I'm interested in IT anyway, and it gives me the chance to do a better job, a job I'd like to do. It's very easy. The tutor is very helpful."

The course is delivered through U-Net (learndirect), which means all the information required is available on-line. Kathryn's job is to keep an eye on – and give a helping hand to – students if necessary.

"If they're having any problems, they'll come into the learning centre to see me," she explains. "Learndirect is a positive thing because it enables the learners to have the flexibility they need. If they're busy one week they can just do no learning, and if they've got more time the following week, they can catch up then. It gives them



Tutor Kathryn Paine (centre) with Heather Guy and Nikos Tsenkos

"I got involved for a better future...I'm interested in IT anyway, and it gives me the chance to do a better job, a job I'd like to do. It's very easy. The tutor is very helpful."





some flexibility. This workplace, in particular, is excellent.”

Heather Guy, an administrator learning IT skills, agrees.

“I haven’t got any computer qualifications, so I’m doing the course because they’ll come in handy if any other jobs come up in the company,” she reasons.

“It’s very easy to learn here because the company is so flexible. Sometimes I come into the learning centre in the evening – I just arrange it with Kay and she’ll leave the door unlocked for me. It fits in around my needs.”

Nikos, too, appreciates the flexibility – and the sense of responsibility – the course affords.

“The fact you’re left to get on with it in your own home, in your own time,

is brilliant,” he enthuses. “If I had to come into the learning centre for an hour every day, I’d feel the need to ask for help but if I’m at home by myself, I have to try it myself, so I gain more.”

The fact there are one-to-one sessions rather than a large class, also helps learners.

“Sometimes people are shy in a group environment,” says Kathryn. “But when it’s just them and me, they feel more relaxed and able to ask questions they might have otherwise been embarrassed to.”

The last word goes to Kay Gill, who is quick to praise the scheme.

“We find it very easy to work with Community on this programme”, she says. “In fact, the whole thing is very positive for us.”

Calmed waters

Dockyard workers in Devon have been steered through stormy waters by a partnership with Train to Gain.

They faced an uncertain future when orders at Appledore Dockyard slowed down but following a take-over by Babcock Marine, they have embarked on a range of courses designed to boost their skill levels . . . and the fortunes of the company are buoyant again!

The company, which made its name building luxury yachts, won the contract to construct the hulls of the UK's new aircraft carriers: the largest ships ever built for the Navy.

It now has a five-year programme for the 65,000-tonne ships that will ensure sustainable employment for the current workforce of 240, with potential for continued growth.

The contract represents a new future for the site, and both management and unions were keen to ensure the workforce was fully trained to meet the demands of both current and future work.

"We worked as a team throughout," says Ian Northam, GMB's Project Worker. "It was all about sitting round the table, singing from the same hymn sheet and working together.

"The workers are being given the opportunity not only to enhance their basic skills, but also to move into

bespoke training – it's the whole package."

Welder Bob Stokoe, the GMB convenor and Union Learning Rep, acknowledges that things have brightened up after the take-over and he recognises the role played by training.

"Looking at the demographic of the yard, the company realised training wasn't just desirable – it was absolutely necessary," he says. "It's encouraging Babcock is seeking to maintain and enhance skill levels here."

To show its commitment to up-skilling, the company signed the Skills Pledge at a unionlearn conference in Cornwall earlier this year. This led to a visit, arranged by Unite officers Heathcliffe Pettifer and Brendan Parkinson with Sam Snowdon of Train to Gain, to Barnstaple company J&S Marine's training centre, which had been supported by unionlearn's Learning Works for All Fund.

Since that visit, a partnership steering group including the employer, unions, North Devon College and Train to Gain, has been set up by GMB and Unite at the shipyard and training activity has taken off at a pace.

"I think it's a great success," said ship building manager Harry McCluskey. "It shows how unions and management can work together to improve people's skills.

"Anything that helps these guys progress helps the company too. Learning literacy and numeracy helps them read charts and where maybe in the past some of the workers suffered in silence, this



Harry McCluskey, Shipbuilder Manager signing up to the Skills Pledge.



Harry McCluskey, Shipbuilding Manager at Babcock Marine's Appledore Shipyard, signing a Learning Agreement with Bob Stokoe, GMB Convenor and ULR at the site.

training will certainly improve their understanding of their job.”

The group's first action was to arrange on-site open days organised by Train to Gain, North Devon College and the unions during Adult Learners Week in May.

Around 60 employees attended and the events generated a real enthusiasm for learning. A number of people came forward who were struggling with the maths required for their engineering courses, and following a short brush-up course funded by unionlearn, now 23 people are studying for their Adult Numeracy Certificates, funded by Train to Gain.

The company are supporting 19 adult trainees through their NVQs, which are run by City College Plymouth with major parts of the course delivered locally at North Devon College.

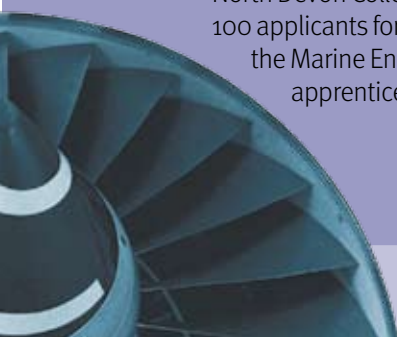
North Devon College also assessed 100 applicants for places on the Marine Engineering apprenticeship course and the

14 new apprentices selected are due to start shortly.

Members of the steering group decided they would go ahead with a full skills audit with a view to perhaps upgrading the old training centre into a fully-computerised learning centre.

Following a successful bid to unionlearn's Learning Works for All Fund, the audit is currently being delivered by Unlocking Cornish Potential and North Devon College. Unionlearn was delighted to be able to put these two providers together to work in partnership on such a significant project. The Skills Audit will identify both current and future training needs across all 16 trades at the yard and help inform the company's investment in upskilling the workforce.

The Steering Group was formalised in October when Harry McCluskey, Shipbuilding Manager at Appledore, signed a Learning Agreement with the GMB and Unite unions.



A rich seam to be mined

Peter Truscott has been driving trucks for coming on 30 years but, he tells **Tim Lezard**, even he has reason to be thankful for Train to Gain.

Unite the union has worked extensively with Imerys over several years on the learning agenda, including Train to Gain programmes.

“You could say Peter has a little bit of experience,” laughs site agent Lionel Johns.

“I’m a big fan of Train to Gain because although we consider our training standards here are second to none, if someone leaves Imerys, our in-house training doesn’t count for anything.

“If, however, like Peter, they complete an NVQ, the qualification could hold them in good stead. It’s something for him to put on his CV.”

“It’s got to be another string in your bow, hasn’t it,” agrees Peter, sitting in the cab of his 60-tonne, rubber-tyred loading shovel – huge digger, to the likes of me and you.

Looking at the skilled way he coaxes the vehicle round the quarry, scooping up 20 tonnes of clay and depositing it in a dumper truck, it’s hard to believe Peter needs any qualifications at all.

But, as he explains, if he should ever look for another job, he’ll have the piece of paper to back his expertise.

“To get the qualification I’ll need to explain the machine and go through all the pre-shift checks

before we start in the morning. We don’t check the oils, all we do is to a visual check of the loader, make sure all the nuts and bolts and greasepipes are in place and there’s no oil leaks. It’s something I do every day, and have done for years.”

Peter is one of many employees at Imerys in Cornwall who benefits from Train to Gain funding.

“We got involved in Train to Gain because a lot of our employees have been with us a considerable number of years,” explains Tracey Gay, the company’s Learning and Development Co-ordinator.

“We invest heavily in on-the-job training and all of our employees are very competent in the jobs they do but some don’t have any nationally-recognised qualifications for those jobs.”

Imerys supports Skills for Life, which is an initiative to help employees gain qualifications in skills such as numeracy and literacy. These courses are run by Cornwall College.

“It’s great because the company finds out who would like to brush up on these skills and they arrange for the people to come along – they do all the work for us!” enthuses tutor Brenda Honey.



(L-R) Peter Truscott in his cab, ULR Becky Bateman and tutor Brenda Honey (far right) teaches her class

“Train to Gain funding is an opportunity for us to be able to give them nationally-recognised qualifications.”

“It’s wonderful to have a ready made group waiting for us, and very nice to go into a group where people are there because they actually want to be there. They’re keen – some of them even take homework home with them, which is unusual!”

Becky Bateman, one of eight Unite union learning reps at Imerys, has benefited hugely from attending the literacy course.

“I’ve got children of school age and it’s quite a long time since I did my GCSEs,” she says. “I try and help them with their homework now. My English isn’t that bad, but things like pronouns and adverbs and key words that they use in homework, I can’t remember what they mean.”

But her family isn’t the only reason she attends, as she explains: “I know of people who have got problems with literacy and numeracy, but they’re too scared to come forward. By doing the course, I’m leading by example and I can say: ‘It’s easy. It’s not scary. No-one’s going to take the mick out of you’.”

There are three employees working in HR who receive Train to Gain funding for their courses in Business and Administration.

“It is very important to keep staff up to date with qualifications and it’s something we should do all the time,” says Tracey Gay. “Without Train to Gain the costs would be higher.”



Gateway to success

Filton College in Bristol this summer received the unionlearn Quality Award for its work with trade unions. **Tim Lezard** met a delighted Head of Department Michele Westlake who explained how trade unions opened the door to hundreds of potential learners.

“I wasn’t looking forward to picking up the award,” admits Michele Westlake. “On the train on the way to London I was terrified of the thought of going up on stage in front of hundreds of people.”

Fortunately, she overcame her butterflies and was able to enjoy the occasion.

“It was a fantastic day out and a real achievement to have won,” she beams. “

“To go to employers and say we won the award has given everyone in the team a real morale boost. Sometimes as a tutor you can feel isolated, so it’s good for them to know they contributed to this award.

“We thought it was essential to go for the Quality Award because while it’s important to get recognition from Ofsted, we felt it was equally important to get recognition from the unions.”

Michele was presented with the award by John Denham MP, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

“I’m delighted to present this award to Filton College in recognition of its work providing learning opportunities for trade unions and their members,” he said.

“Filton College is playing an important role in raising skills levels in Bristol and through that is helping individuals to develop their full potential, which can also benefit their families, their communities and their employer.”

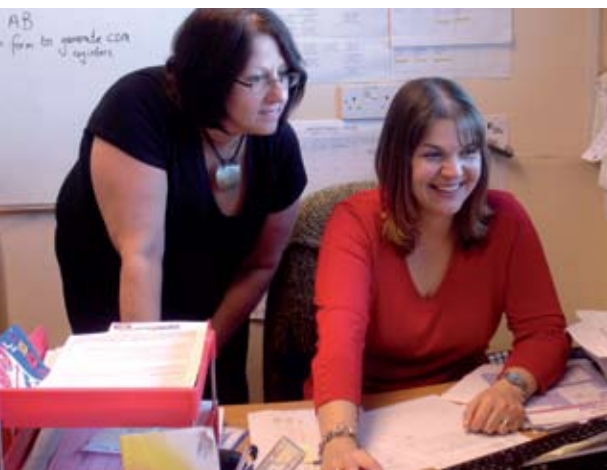
The award is a fitting tribute to the work carried out by Michele and her team in working with various unions, including Unite, the Fire Brigades Union, Communication Workers Union and Britannia Staff Union.

Often what started as initial taster courses to refresh skills at work – literacy and numeracy are particularly popular – grew into well-organised, well-run and well-attended courses.

“Our most successful projects have been the ones with union support,” says Michele, unequivocally. “This is because the union learning reps (ULRs) on the ground encourage their colleagues to participate, and they [the ULRs] work with us to ensure they [the colleagues] turn up and achieve.

Michele certainly recognises the huge input by unions and the contribution made by ULRs themselves.

“One of the difficulties working with companies independently



Michele Westlake (l) with Becky Stallard.



L to R: Dominic Fisher, Learning Manager with Becky and Michelle receiving the unionlearn Quality Award from John Denham (MP) Secretary of State for the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills

“Our most successful projects have been the ones with union support, because the ULRs on the ground encourage their colleagues to participate.”

without the union is going in and getting the staff to listen to you, to gain their interest and to get the managers on side,” she explains.

“When you work with the unions, it’s the ULRs that do the groundwork. People know them, people trust them and they go out there and spread the word you’re coming in the first place, so people are interested before you even get there.

“The biggest plus point is that they support us when we’re doing presentations, which takes away some of the awkwardness of the staff and the barriers come down.”

This point is also made by Becky Stallard, who manages the Literacy and Numeracy Skills For Life Project.

“Having ULRs in there allows the employees to relax,” she says.

“For example, if they have a need that maybe they’ve managed to hide or they feel embarrassed about, they can raise it with the ULR, where they wouldn’t with the company or their manager.

“All in all, it means that when me and the team go in, we’re ready to deliver.”

The final hurdle to achieving the award – compiling the portfolio of evidence was achieved with very little fuss.

“The support we had from unionlearn was superb,” says Michele. “They worked with us in all the form-filling and they would review what we’ve written and give us advice.

“The process was so easy that when we came to judgement day, all we did was allocate one member of staff to the Quality Award Assessor, gave her the portfolio of evidence and left her in a room with lots of coffee for half a day... it was plain sailing!”



Learning lifts gloom

Workers made redundant from a South West firm have found new jobs in record time – thanks, in part, to Train To Gain. **Tim Lezard** finds out how they did it.

It was a gloomy day at work: all 16 staff at Philip & Tacey, an educational equipment supplier in Barnstaple, were told they were going to lose their jobs after a takeover.

“Our first reaction was ‘Panic!’,” said stock-checker Trish Thomas. “I was worried about myself but more worried about my colleagues – some of whom had worked there for 30 years plus – and how they’d manage to find a new job.”

Time was of the essence because if the employees wanted new jobs, they also needed new skills to compete in today’s marketplace.

Luckily for them, unionlearn and Train To Gain were on hand and, together with Brendan Parkinson, Unite’s Regional Learning Organiser, and North Devon College, an emergency plan was hatched.

The College hired an extra tutor to run an NVQ course in warehousing, distribution and storage.

“The course normally takes twelve months, so for everyone to complete it – and pass it – in just under four months was an incredible achievement,” said North Devon College’s Clive Rowe.

This was a point reinforced by Brendan Parkinson, who said: “We had three months to get these people qualified. It wasn’t a lot of time, but at least we knew there was a timetable for what we had to achieve. We knew exactly what we had to do and when we needed to do it.

“The company gave us a pot of money to help train the workforce and the NVQs were funded by Train to Gain, but it wasn’t enough for the extra qualifications people

Maggie Fellows and Brendan Parkinson (Unite) presenting funds from Learning Works for All to assist those facing redundancy





Dee Rogers, unionlearn (r) and Brendan Parkinson (Unite) working together to support workers facing redundancy

wanted, so we secured some more money from unionlearn’s Learning Works for All Fund, which we decided to spend on benefiting as many people as possible.”

This additional money was wisely spent on speedily-arranged IT courses at the local learndirect provider, Barnstaple Pathfinder Centre.

“In as much as people losing their jobs can be a success, this was a success,” said Brendan. “We couldn’t have done it without unionlearn – they made it

simple for people, with everything put in place for them; all they had to do was turn up and sign on.”

All the workers made redundant who sought new jobs have now got them, whether it’s working in accountancy, warehousing, in the ambulance service or, as Trish Thomas has done, training as a social worker.

“I’m very grateful to unionlearn,” she said. “I went on a course to brush up my English and Maths and now I’ve been accepted to train so I can work for social services.”

Unionlearn Project Worker Dee Rogers said: “This was a really focused partnership of unions, providers and funders brought together very speedily to support workers facing redundancy.

“The site reps found out exactly what their members needed, Unite negotiated with the providers to deliver it and Train to Gain funding was used to support the NVQs. North Devon College pulled out all the stops to deliver the NVQs in a really short space of time and Pathfinder arranged special group sessions for the IT training. All the employees, many of whom hadn’t undertaken any learning since leaving school, were able to leave with up-to-date qualifications.

“It just shows that, even in the most difficult of times, unions and providers working together and using Train to Gain funding can deliver real benefits to members.”

“Time was of the essence because if the employees wanted new jobs, they also needed new skills to compete in today’s marketplace.”

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At unionlearn

Our belief is that the life chances of all people can be transformed through access to learning throughout their working lives.

Our purpose is to help unions open up a wide range of learning opportunities for their members.

Our goal is to become the centre of excellence for facilitating high quality union-led learning.

Our success will be determined by the sustainability of this activity through unions securing learning and skills at the heart of their organisation.



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Edited by Tim Lezard 07810 641 459 lezard@elmtreecottages.co.uk. Designed by Rumba www.rumbadesign.co.uk.
Printed on recycled paper containing 70% post consumer waste.

