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1. Annual Branch Skills Matrix – Good Practice!

Identifying members' learning needs is a key part of your role as a UCU learning rep.

Now is the time of year when many UCU branches hold their AGMs which are critical to the operation, effectiveness and local democracy of your branch. It is also the time when members will take up new or different activist roles within the branch committee potentially giving rise to new or different learning and training needs.

As part of your role and part of the branches annual activity, it is good practice to conduct an annual matrix of branch skills so that a collective picture of strength and weakness can be developed highlighting both the collective and individual learning needs of your branch activists. Conducting a skills matrix is essential to ensure the development and sustainability of knowledge and skills of the branch committee and local reps.

Once learning needs have been collated and reviewed, relevant training opportunities can then be identified and/or developed such as:

- bespoke training for activists new to the role
- refresher training for existing reps and officers
- subject specific briefings for the branch
- branch based strategy training for the whole branch
- mentoring or shadowing schemes to share skills & good practice.

Integrating this activity into the annual cycle of the branch may also encourage more new people to get involved in the work of the branch if they know that opportunities to up-skill will be made available post AGM.

UCU centrally has developed a quick online branch skills matrix which you can forward to your branch committee and network of local reps and ask them to complete. The responses

will come back to UCU centrally but can be forwarded to Learning Reps. You can access the online matrix here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YZW53HC>

To distribute the online survey you can copy and paste this link into an email and/or you can request an electronic copy if you want to send it as an attachment or for printing purposes.

A few points to consider when surveying:

1. Objectives

Before embarking on the matrix of your branch committee you should be clear about its purpose and inform recipients as to why you are carrying out a matrix of branch skills.

2. Your approach

The way you approach the survey may depend on a number of factors e.g.

- the size of your branch
- the location of branch members i.e. split sites etc.
- what additional information you need
- the relationship between UCU, other unions and the employer (you may want to carry out a joint survey).

After considering the above factors, think about how best to distribute the skills matrix to branch members by:

- post
- individual interviews
- group discussions e.g. at a branch meeting?
- a mixture of the above e.g. you may wish to send out the matrix or use your College/University intranet but also offer people the opportunity for a one to one discussion.

3. Carrying out the matrix

Once you have decided on the methods you will use consider the practicalities in carrying out your survey. Be clear about:

- how you will distribute the questionnaire(s) or set up meetings
- who you will need help from
- timescale for the surveys.

4. Collating information

Have a plan for what you are going to do when you have collated all the information and who and how to share it.

2. TUC Report on Union Learning Representatives (ULRs)

This research report (<http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/policy/learn-3926-f0.cfm>) commissioned by the TUC suggests that ULR activity is increasing and that both managers and ULRs believe that it enhances workplace learning, closes skills gaps and improves union-management relations. The findings suggest that ULRs have the greatest effect within organisations where, in addition to the support of their own unions, management have a

clear commitment to union learning. However, the single most important factor in shaping ULR activity and impact was the existence of negotiations between ULRs and employers. The report argues that if ULRs are to deliver positive outcomes both for their members and their organisations, employer engagement must be demonstrated by positive workplace relations and a collective bargaining framework that explicitly recognises the centrality of learning and training.

3. Professional Development Policies Not Performance Management

On the back of concerns raised by a number of HE branches/LAs regarding the increasing tendency of HEIs to introduce detrimental performance management regimes, negotiating guidance has been adopted by the HEC to counter such proposals and to put forward alternative procedures focused on improving professional development policies. The guidance has been circulated as HE circular UCUHE97. See www.ucu.org.uk/circ/rtf/UCUHE97.rtf.

Tabling counter-proposals based on the principles contained in these guidelines may prove to be an effective means of inducing management to withdraw heavy-handed, unacceptable and detrimental proposals for performance management.

4. Autism Training and Awareness Online Training Resources

The Department of Health has funded a series of on-line training resources and booklets to increase awareness and understanding of autism across all public services.

Working with the Social Care Institute for Excellence, Health Talk Online, Skills for Health and Skills for Care, these organisations have produced a range of materials to enable frontline staff to better recognise and respond more effectively to the needs of adults with autism.

These resources can be accessed at the links below:

Social Care Institute for Excellence:

<http://www.scie.org.uk/socialcaretv/topic.asp?guid=36fd44de-5a56-4a18-9224-18f23b72c7c5>

Healthtalkonline: <http://www.healthtalkonline.org/Autism/>

National Autistic Society: <http://www.autism.org.uk/autismstrategy>

Information about the autism strategy progress available from:

<http://www.autism.org.uk/autismstrategyprogress>.

5. FE Initial Teacher Training plus UCU's Teacher Educator Networks

Funding

Problems are looming for FE initial Teacher Training (ITT) funding. Currently FE ITT is funded through HEFCE for HE institutions that deliver FE ITT. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funds FE ITT through awarding bodies. Next year 2011-2012 HEFCE funding for teacher education is reduced and this will impact on FE ITT. The SFA funding will be £7.5m for 2011-2012. The

real crisis will occur in 2012-2013 when HE teaching funds in England will be reduced by 80% and restricted to STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and clinical programmes. The government's intention is that the funding will be replaced by the new HE fees and loan system. For SFA funding, it has already been announced that all BIS funding for Level 3 and above programmes will go, to be replaced by a loan system similar to the one to be put in place for HE. UCU and indeed all FE stakeholders are appalled by this. Many FE teacher trainees are part time hourly paid lecturers and may well not be earning enough to pay off any loan. It will present yet another disincentive to enter FE teaching. Strong representations have been made to BIS and John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning. BIS have asked the AoC to conduct a review of FE ITT and AoC have contacted colleges to respond to a survey on FE ITT. We will contact FE UCU members working in FE ITT when we have more news. Let Dan Taubman dtaubman@ucu.org.uk know if the future funding for FE ITT is already being felt in your college.

UCU Teacher Educators' Networks

The Policy Department has revived the UCU teacher educators' networks. A seminar was held for UCU HE educators of primary and secondary teachers (see <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5020>). A similar seminar was held for UCU FE teacher educators (http://www.ucu.org.uk/seminar_feteachered). If you would like to join either or both of the networks contact Diana Hendry at dhendry@ucu.org.uk.

6. Learning While Working: Success Stories on Workplace Learning in Europe

A new report, 'Learning while working: Success stories on workplace learning in Europe' by the CEDEFOP, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, reviews the role of adult learning in the workplace. It discusses four 'driving forces' for adult learning policy and strategy in Europe:

- public strategies aimed at widening access and encouraging participation in workplace learning;
- the contributions of social partners to developing and expanding learning in the workplace;
- sectoral initiatives lead by partnerships aimed at stimulating innovation and economic growth;
- the professional development of in-house trainers.

The report acknowledges the vital role of unions, noting that they can negotiate and provide learning opportunities for employees and encouraging workers, particularly the low-skilled, to take part in training. Unions are also recognised as playing a role in developing a culture of lifelong learning in the workplace, identifying, together with employers, skill shortages and training needs at company and sectoral level, and helping workers develop transferable skills to increase employability or readiness to progress or change position within their current employment.

The full report is available here:

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3060_en.pdf

7. Adult Learners Week (14-20 May) and Learning at Work Day (19 May)

Salford University Unions Arrange First Class Learning for Adult Learners' Week

Unions at Salford University marked Adult Learners' Week by putting on a range of learning sessions for staff, supported by unionlearn North West, the TUC's learning and skills organisation. On Learning at Work Day (LAWD –Thursday 19th May) information, advice and guidance on CVs, computer skills, and careers advice were made available. Partners included Jobcentre Plus, Next Step and University of Bolton. See:

<http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/initiatives/learn-3984-f0.cfm> for further information.

Midwives Make a Dash for Learning at University College Hospital Royal College of Midwives (RCM)

Staff took part in a trolley dash to promote learning activities in the workplace and the work of Union Learning Reps as part of the national Adult Learners' Week (14-20 May), supported by unionlearn Southern and Eastern Region, the TUC's learning and skills organisation. See

<http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/initiatives/learn-3985-f0.cfm> for further details.

8. Forthcoming Event

Wednesday 22 June, 9.45am – 3.45pm: Joint NUT-UCU Seminar on 14-19 Education NUT Headquarters, Hamilton House

The National Union of Teachers and University and College Union are holding a joint seminar on 14-19 education. The purpose of the seminar is to build on the work already undertaken by NUT and UCU on 14-19, to relook at these policies in the light of the Coalition Government's policies and to explore further joint working and campaigning on changes occurring to 14-19 education. It is intended also that the seminar will contribute to the development of joint policies on 14-19 between the two unions.

For information on the seminar including the full seminar programme and how to apply to attend, go to: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/14-19seminar11>.

9. New 2011 Supporting Learners Guides Available

Unionlearn's popular toolkit of *Supporting Learners Guides* for all union reps has been updated and is available here: <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/advice/learn-4000-f0.cfm> to download or order as a printed copy.

10. UCU Learning Rep News: Feedback, Contributions and Next Edition

If you have any comments or queries regarding UCU Learning Rep News or would like to contribute material for the next edition, please contact: Diana Hendry, Public Policy Administrator at dhendry@ucu.org.uk. The next newsletter will be issued in early August.