

News release

28 May 2009

Funding helps improve workforce skills

Many employees have returned to education and training for the first time since leaving school, with some gaining a formal qualification for the first time in their lives, as a result of over £6million funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

Since 1999, the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) has funded over 127 projects in companies across Wales. It encourages employees and their family members, whether they are members of a union or not, to engage with education and training. This has helped contribute to an increase in the take-up of learning by people who have no previous tradition of learning as well as an overall improvement in skills within the workforce.

In a report published today, Estyn found that employees who left school with little or no formal qualifications have benefited from learning opportunities in the safe and supportive environment of their workplace. Without the support of the funding, it is highly unlikely that they would have returned to education.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, says, "The Wales Union Learning Fund has benefited employees in Wales for over ten years and now, in this economic climate, it is vital that we continue to develop the skills of our workforce through schemes such as this. The strong partnership working between unions, employers and employees has been key to successfully implementing the programme. Recognition within companies of the benefits of lifelong learning has improved the motivation, self-esteem and confidence of many employees."

Union representatives, who aid the projects, help employees start to overcome their barriers over returning to education by asking them to identify and discuss their hobbies and

interests. This enables union representatives to carefully match the opportunities available through the WULF programme to the needs of the learners. This has resulted in a high staying on rate for many courses, often in excess of 90%.

However, in many cases, the starting date of a course is so delayed by poor planning that the two-year funding runs out before employees have completed their training. Estyn, therefore, recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government extends funding for each project for up to three years, to make sure that each employee receives at least two full years of learning opportunities.

Inspectors found that the training has had a positive impact on individuals and their employer's business in many WULF funded companies, such as Cardiff Bus, Memory Lane Cakes and Kellogg's. In these companies, project managers and union learning representatives have developed and sustained outstanding partnership working with employees.

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors

About the report

- Estyn's report 'Evaluation of the quality and value of the education and training funded through the Wales Union Learning Fund' has been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and is available in full at <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/ThematicReports.asp>
- The report is based on meeting with a sample of union learning representatives, project managers, employers and employees who are taking part in WULF projects. Inspectors also met with Welsh Assembly Government officials responsible for the WULF programme.

About Estyn

Estyn is the Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales. Our aim is to achieve excellence for all in learning in Wales. We do this by providing an independent, high-quality inspection and advice service.

Our vision is to be recognised through the expertise of our staff as an authoritative voice on learning in Wales.

We are independent from, but funded by the Welsh Assembly Government (under Section 104 of the Government of Wales Act 1998).

For further information please visit our website www.estyn.gov.uk