

*Usdaw*

Campaigning  
for Lifelong  
Learning

An Usdaw Guide to

***Working with  
Colleges***

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*Usdaw*

*Union of Shop, Distributive  
and Allied Workers*

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# **Introduction and Credits**

With the launch of Usdaw's Campaign for Lifelong Learning, Learning Reps and Project Workers began to start working with and forming partnerships with colleges and education providers.

This guide is the result of, and attempts to sum up, the experience we have had of working with colleges. We are confident that it will be of use to Usdaw Learning Reps and Officers who are developing access to learning for members at sites they are responsible for. In particular, we feel it will be of benefit where sites are approaching colleges for the first time.

To gather the information for this manual, we brought together project workers from Usdaw and the TUC who have worked with Usdaw sites. We also invited certain key people from colleges we have worked with. This discussion produced the first draft. This draft was then discussed and built upon at two TUC seminars. Finally, Catherine Cain of Wigan and Leigh College gave special assistance with drafting the section on How College Finance Works. We would like to thank all the participants, and particularly Catherine, for their help. This manual is the collective product of all this experience, but of course the final version is Usdaw's and any mistakes and inaccuracies are ours.

We would like to give special thanks to Wigan and Leigh College and MANCAT College, without whose support we would not have been able to make the progress we have. We would also like to thank TUC Learning Services whose help has been invaluable. The Union Learning Fund's financial assistance has made possible things that would otherwise have been impossible, so finally, thank you to the DFES and its Union Learning Fund team.

However, the real heroes behind this pamphlet are the hundreds of Usdaw Learning Reps who are pioneering the road that makes learning accessible to our members. Without their effort, none of what this pamphlet describes would be possible.

# **Section 1 – Key Principles in our Partnership with a College**

Eight key principles govern our Partnership with colleges. Any arrangements and agreements that we reach with colleges need to embody these principles.

**1. The Partnership aims to promote and encourage Lifelong Learning for our members, and not just skills for their current jobs.**

Lifelong Learning has three aspects – the training a person needs to perform the job they currently do, the learning they need to progress their career and the learning they need for their personal development. Our relationship with a college must support and encourage all three aspects of an individual's development, and so develop a learning culture within the workplace.

**2. The Partnership aims to develop and sustain a long-term relationship between the college and the workplace.**

Where possible we seek to maintain a long-term and sustainable relationship with a provider. Rather than limit horizons to one learning experience, we need to develop a relationship that can evolve, in which trust and experience can grow, and in which learners can develop themselves. This works best where the provider is a local college. This means that individual learners know what to expect and have a natural route for progression.

**3. The Partnership is a three-way partnership between the employer, the college and Usdaw Learning Reps.**

Although the learning may be delivered in or near the employer's premises, the college must respect that all decisions must be taken collectively by Usdaw Learning Reps, the employer and the college working together. Usually this will mean discussing issues and concerns at meetings of the Site Level Steering Group.

**4. The Partnership must make learning more accessible for our members.**

Many of our members have been excluded from Adult Learning. To involve our members in Adult Learning, we have to address problems of access to learning. This involves four key elements:

- i) Making the learning accessible by locating it in or near the workplace.
- ii) Making the learning accessible by arranging it at times that fit around shift patterns and the busy working lives of our members, many of whom are carers.

- iii) Making learning accessible by ensuring learners have enough support.
- iv) Making learning accessible by ensuring the type and delivery of the learning is appropriate for adults returning to learning for the first time.

**5. The Partnership must strive to make the learning affordable for our members.**

Many Usdaw members are low paid and for them the price of learning is very high. While we understand that the college needs to cover its costs, all partners must strive to keep the price of learning as low as is possible.

**6. The Partnership must ensure that there are opportunities to provide breadth of learning and progression.**

Our Partnerships should respond to the needs of our members who indicate what they wish to learn. Lifelong Learning is broader than offering Intro IT and Basic Skills. Sometimes there will not be enough learners interested in a preferred subject and the learner may need to attend the local college. However in other cases, where there are enough learners, a course can be set up on site. Many examples of this exist, including British Sign Language, Spanish, etc. We also need to ensure progression routes so learners who have got a taste for learning can move forward.

**7. Our Partnership must offer adequate professional guidance.**

Many Usdaw members do not have a clear focus of the way that they want to develop their learning or the type of learning available to them. A significant proportion of our learners have difficulties with basic skills and/or have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. A strong guidance element needs to be written into the Partnership.

**8. Our learners are new learners and deserve the highest quality of teaching.**

Our members' experience at school has often not been very positive. To rebuild their confidence as learners, we need to ensure that the learning that they are given is of the highest standard, delivered by tutors who understand the difficulties of Adult Learners returning to learn. We need to ensure there are adequate systems to monitor the quality of teaching, and that these systems use the experience and knowledge of our Learning Reps.

## **Section 2 – When Approaching a College be Clear What You Want**

Colleges are large institutions that can offer a lot. They can offer learning and learning support in a variety of ways, so you need to be clear what will suit your workplace.

- Be clear on the facilities that the college can use to deliver the learning – or that you want the college to provide. Is there an already equipped learning centre on site? Or a room that can be used for Laptop Learning? Or a room they could equip as a learning centre?
- Check out if there are other learning centres that can be used in the area. It may be that there is some kind of local college or community learning centre near your site that could be used.
- Do a survey in the workplace so you can show the **volume** and **range** of learning people are interested in. Prepare a summary so the college can understand the volume and kind of learning that is needed. This will help persuade the college to allocate resources to learning in the workplace.
- Ensure you have information that shows the starting point of the site and the **kind** of workplace it is. This could include numbers employed on the site, approximate breakdown of men/women, full-time/part-time, ethnic mix, shift patterns, type of jobs on site. A lot of this information may be available from the site HR staff.
- Be clear you are after more than Intro IT and Basic Skills. It is easy for colleges to understand there may be a market for these – and it is easy for them to forget the breadth of the agenda of our learners.

## Examples of What Colleges Can Provide and How Learning Can Be Delivered

As well as running specific courses on their premises, learning can be delivered by colleges in a number of ways. You need to be clear what would be best for your circumstance, and so what you need. Some examples of the types of ways a college can provide learning are given below:

- In sites where the employer has already set up a learning centre with a reasonable number of PCs, a college may be willing to use the learning centre to run courses. Usually a college would want there to be about 10 PCs, together with some printers. The room would need to be booked on a regular basis and a college tutor would run courses.
- In larger workplaces (say 400 plus), a college may be willing to equip a learning centre on site. This would depend on how many learners a college thought would use the centre. In Reality at Wigan, Wigan College equipped a room provided by the employer with 12 PCs. This room is now used for the college to tutor a number of courses, including Introducing Computers and Basic Skills.
- In smaller workplaces (say between 100 and 400), a college may be willing to deliver learning using laptop computers. In Tesco in the Manchester area, the WEA would set up portable laptop computers and printers in the store training room one day a week. The tutor would then run courses for 2 or 3 groups during the day.
- Not all learning needs computers. In many cases a college will send a tutor to a workplace to run courses in the company training room or a similar facility. In Reality in Oldham, there is a learning centre that is not equipped with computers. For IT courses and for courses that need computers, the college provide portable laptop computers.
- E-learning is learning using the internet or a CD-ROM on a PC. Often colleges will be willing to set up access points to the internet in workplaces. Often these can involve only a small number of PCs so they cannot be used for taught courses. However, they do mean that once learners have got used to them, they can connect to the internet at times of their choice to carry on with their course. However, E-learning may not suit everyone so don't be pushed in this direction if it is not appropriate.

## **Section 3 – Making Your Initial Approach to the College**

Often colleges underestimate the kind of Partnership we want. They think we are just after brokering “one off” courses. You need to make sure you get your approach right to avoid this confusion.

- Approach the college at senior level – maybe at principal or vice-principal level. You are after establishing a strategic relationship with the college, so you need to talk to people with a strategic perspective, not just someone in the IT department!
- If the college has a Trade Union Education Unit, contact them to get information about the wider college. But also make sure the staff in the Trade Union Studies Unit understand that what is involved is broader than they can deliver.
- Be confident in what you are bringing to the college. You are introducing a wide variety of potential learners to the college, not simply brokering the odd course. This should be the starting point of the relationship. Point out that the support our Learning Reps give to the learners means the drop-out rate tends to be low compared to courses run on college premises or on a site where there are no Learning Reps.
- Colleges may not be profit-making organisations but they have to cover their costs and operate in a commercial manner. When approaching the college have a clear idea of the business potential of establishing a long-term Partnership with your workplace. Give the college an indication of the potential learners on site, the kind of learners they are and the learning they want provided.
- Stress that you are concerned with “Lifelong Learning” not simply job-related training. As employers are meant to contribute to job-related training, this can have implications for how the college funds the learning.
- Colleges often make decisions on trust and judgement. It will help to explain a little about Learning Reps and their role. It may also help if you have someone from the company with you at this meeting to show that the Learning Reps and the company are working together, and that the college will be joining a three-way partnership.
- Ask for a copy of the strategic plan. Every college has a strategic plan, and you can ask the college to send a summary version. It will have a section on work-based learning. Check out what it says about working with union/management partnerships. There will also be a section on “Widening Participation and Working in the Community”. See if there are any aims that you and the college have in common. Where there are aims in common, it may be that you can offer ways of helping the college to achieve the aims it has set itself.
- Be careful which departments get involved. Avoid falling into the trap of ending up with a department whose vision is no broader than flogging job-related NVQs. We often find that community education departments understand adult learning for our members. Don’t be afraid to ask how the department or the college did when last inspected.



## Examples of Approaching Colleges

- In Wigan, reps from the Reality site arranged to see a senior manager of the local college. A college funding procurement officer also attended the meeting to advise on how learning could be funded. The reps brought information on the numbers and the kind of people who worked at the site. They also brought the results of a questionnaire that they had persuaded members to complete. The college quickly saw the opportunities in the situation, and agreed to equip an on-site learning centre and to provide tutor supported learning on-site. A member of the college staff sits on the site learning steering committee, and one college manager handles contact and co-ordination with all the parts of the college that are involved in providing learning.
- In most cases we would like to link to the local college because if members are going to follow through their learning they are likely to use the local college. Local colleges can also get funding to subsidise courses. However, at Littlewoods Bolton, the local college could not provide for our members' needs so the site had to invite another college to be a provider partner.
- At Tesco Welham Green, there were two potential colleges. The site learning committee agreed a "brief" which explained what kind of things the site wanted from the colleges. This was sent to both colleges who were invited to make a proposal about how they would support learning at the site. A panel made up of Learning Reps and site management decided which college to use.
- At a Sainsbury's Depot in Lancashire, the reps were uncertain which college to approach. TUC Learning Services had a good knowledge of the local colleges and they were able to advise which one would be a good one for the site to link up with.

## A Sample Letter

Dear Vice-Principal

### **The Usdaw/Any Company Learning Partnership**

Usdaw and Any Company are committed to working together to promote access to learning for our members and staff at the Walton Road site. I am the Usdaw project worker responsible for developing this Partnership.

Our members at the site have formed a network of Learning Representatives, who have now been trained using the TUC/Open College accredited Front Line Advice and Guidance course. Together with the company we have formed a steering group at the site to promote this initiative. Our aim is to make learning accessible and affordable for our members and for all the staff who work at the site. We want to develop a culture of Lifelong Learning, which would include career and personal development.

To achieve this we would like to explore the possibility of developing and sustaining a long-term Partnership between your college and our site. The Partnership would consist of the college, Usdaw and Any Company. In particular, we would want to explore the ways that you could work with us to make learning accessible for our members. This could involve locating it in or near the site, and running courses at times that fit around the shift patterns of the people who work here.

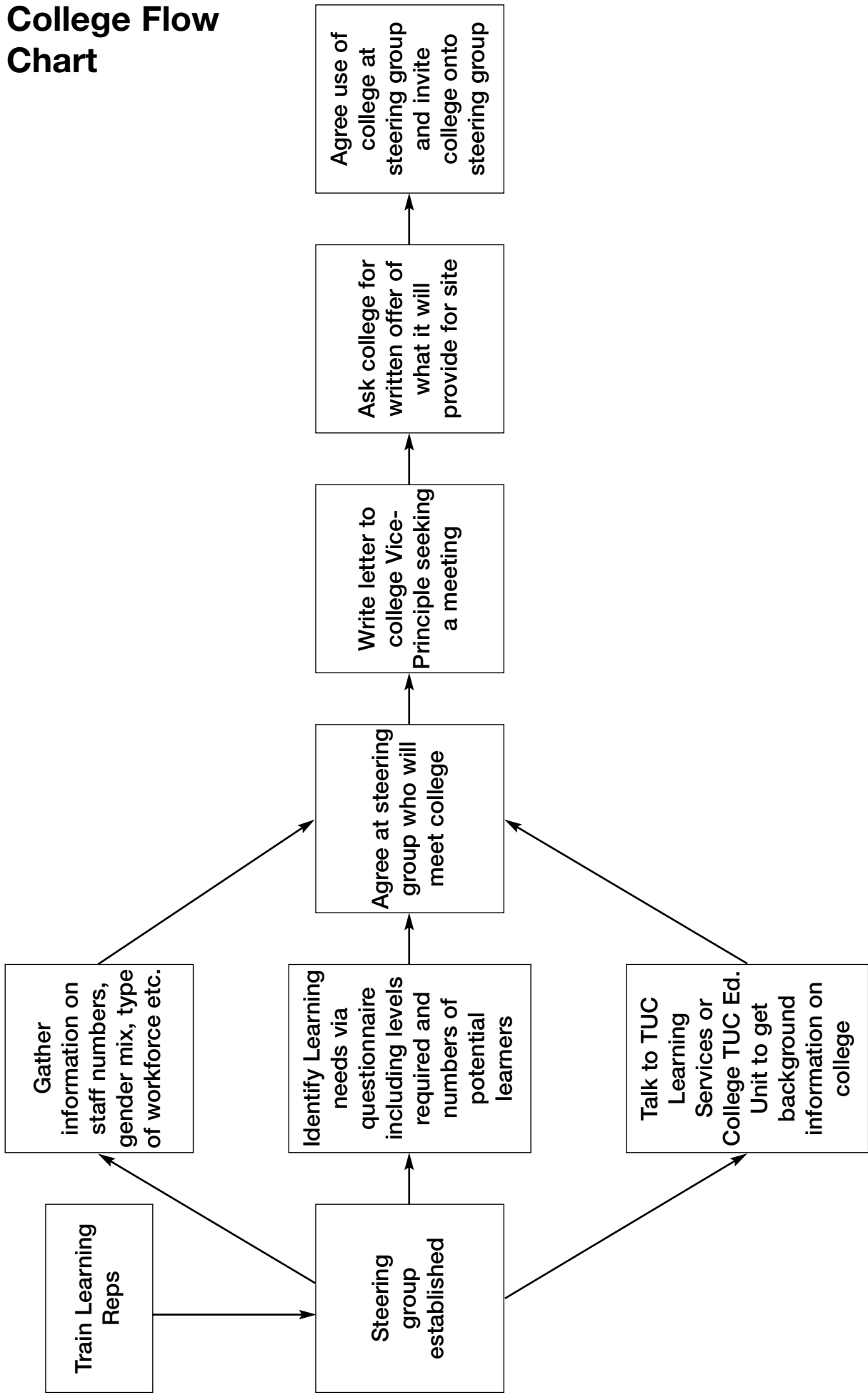
We have just completed a survey of the learning needs of our members. This involves a questionnaire that has been completed by \_\_\_\_\_ people.

To this end I would be grateful if myself, a Learning Rep from the \_\_\_\_\_ site and the manager from the site could meet with you to discuss what the college has to offer. We, in turn, will be able to give you information concerning the number of people who work here, and the kind and level of learning that they are interested in pursuing.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

# College Flow Chart



## **Section 4 – Ways of Working Together**

Although we have driven the learning initiative, colleges often believe they should deal with the employer, and only deal with the learning reps as an after thought. It is important that the three partners (the college, the local management and the Learning Reps) address and resolve problems together. This would usually be done at the site steering group. So the steering group becomes the key to working together.

- It is always useful to have a single point of contact within the college, and usually this should be the person who sits on the steering group. It is also important that this person has experience and authority, and so does not have to keep referring issues back.
- The site steering group needs to keep track of who is getting involved in the learning, and what kind of learning is popular with the members. This will help target promotional activity. The college will keep all kinds of statistics about the learners. It is easier if the college agree to provide a selection of this information to the steering group.
- Where more than one college is involved, it is important that they understand that there needs to be inter-college collaboration.
- There will be an ongoing need to have promo days at the site. The college can help with these by setting up stalls, running taster sessions, etc. Often the colleges are only too keen to do promotional work during Adult Learners' Week and Learning at Work Day.
- Advice and guidance for potential learners is very important. The college and the site need to be careful to ensure that this advice is given in a member-friendly way.
- All three partners need to work together to ensure the quality of our members' learning experience. The college will have its own quality assurance arrangements, and will undoubtedly be willing to share the results of these systems with the steering group. The college also needs to understand that through the Learning Reps there are additional channels or feedback. Reps get feedback from participants during the course, and can arrange post-course evaluation questionnaires and even focus groups to help gather the views of the participants.

## Examples of Working Together

- A retail multiple had more than one site spread across a number of towns. More than one local college would be involved in delivering the learning. So one college agreed to act as the lead college. This college sat on the steering group and co-ordinated the learning initiative with the other colleges on the other sites.
- During Adult Learners' Week, on one site a college working with the steering group helped run a learning promotion day. They arranged both half-hour taster sessions and demonstrations on subjects as varied as Using the Net, Aromatherapy and Playing the Guitar. There were 3 or 4 college tutors on hand for most of the day to answer questions and to encourage members to participate.
- At Littlewoods in Shaw, the steering group arranged an information and advice day. Several colleges set up stalls and provided information on what was available. The Careers Service offered information on developing skills. At that time there was no learning centre on-site, but over 200 members signed up for ILAs and over 100 signed up for college courses.
- In Liverpool, the Community College has worked closely with a Learning Rep in Ethel Austin. Ethel Austin has a number of relatively small stores. The college has provided customised learning in a range of ways using their outreach and drop in centres. At one store there were enough learners for the college to provide learning using laptops.

## **An example of the terms of reference of a site steering group**

### **Lifelong Learning Steering Group – Littlewoods, Shaw Terms of Reference**

#### **Membership of the Steering Group**

In line with the Company's Lifelong Learning Policy, the Shaw steering group will be a joint forum comprising of six Union Learning Representatives, Usdaw project worker, three nominated managers from Shaw Distribution centre, and a nominated member of the training department. Where the nominated Learning Reps from the committee are unable to attend meetings, reserve reps will be nominated to deputise.

The committee will reserve the right to invite/co-opt other relevant people both internal and external to the organisation to assist with activities as appropriate.

#### **Role of the group**

The overall role of the steering group will be to promote, initiate, support and monitor Lifelong Learning activities within Shaw distribution centre. It will endeavour to make learning opportunities both inside and outside the company as accessible as possible, to enable all employees to maximise their own individual potential.

#### **Responsibilities of the group**

The responsibilities of the steering group will include:

- Develop and promote a range of on site learning initiatives to encourage individuals back into learning.
- Monitor and evaluate the activity and feedback.
- Explore new initiatives, both internal and external which will support the learning process (for example, Individual learning Accounts etc.).
- Identify funding opportunities to assist with learning activities.
- Link with local F.E. colleges and other outside bodies to maximise potential for learning opportunities.
- Ensure there is effective communication with all relevant trade union and company structures about the aims/objectives and progress of the project.

#### **Meeting Arrangements**

The group will meet on bi-monthly basis or more often as the group decide is necessary. Minutes and action points from the meeting will be recorded a précis of which will be available to all staff via the notice boards.

## Information, Advice and Guidance

Many Usdaw members are interested in getting involved in learning, but are unsure what and how to study. Good Advice and Guidance can be the key to members making the right decisions, which suit their needs and circumstances. The key to getting good advice is to be able to speak to a well trained professional who understands the problems and the possibilities.

The government has encouraged the people who give advice to form local partnerships called IAG Partnerships (Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships). Typically members of IAG Partnerships will include careers services, further education colleges, libraries and training providers. All IAG Partnerships are keen to get involved with unions and employers.

Organisations that are full members of IAG Partnerships need to be accredited to the Matrix Quality Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance Services.

### What Can Site Steering Groups Do?

- Make contact with your local IAG Partnership through your project worker, TUC Learning Services Unit or Usdaw Education department.
- Invite someone from the IAG Partnership to your site steering group to explain what they can offer.
- Agree with the site management to facilitate IAG professionals coming on site to give advice to members.

## **Section 5 – Linking into Your Usdaw Structures**

Our Lifelong Learning campaign is part of our organising strategy within the workplace. It is important that Learning Reps link into the work of the union more widely. Union Learning Reps do not work alone but are responsible to the union more widely.

- Keep your shop stewards committee, branch and full-time officer informed. When reporting back the information provided by the college can be very useful.
- The wider union is also a resource for Learning Reps. Colleges all have different pricing structures and ways of doing things. The price of courses can vary widely. Discuss what the college is offering with Learning Reps from other sites.
- Usdaw's Education Department or TUC Learning Services can all help. So keep the Education Department informed and don't be afraid to ring up and ask. You are not on your own.
- The legislation to give Union Learning Reps a legal right to time off to train and to carry out their duties will soon be passed by Parliament. This will put Learning Reps on the same footing as shop stewards and health and safety reps. Sites will be able to have a team of reps and it is important to work as a team.



## **Section 6 – Developing Sustainability**

We are in this campaign for the long term. It is important that we all take responsibility for ensuring learning initiatives are sustained in the medium and longer term.

- 1.** Sustainability involves developing the relationship. Key to this is the college participating in the site steering group. The college is then fully integrated into the development of the learning and has a better opportunity to understand the opportunities and difficulties.
- 2.** Sustainability involves finance. There is no getting away from this. Appendix 1 explains the way colleges are funded. But it is important to be realistic about the kind of facilities that a site can sustain. A rough rule of thumb would be that if there are fewer than 350 staff, a site cannot sustain a large enough computerised learning centre large enough for tutor led learning. For these sites the college needs to be thinking of laptop learning as the mode of delivery.
- 3.** There will need to be promotion days periodically to encourage more staff to be involved. Because they are involved in the steering group, the college will fully appreciate their role in regular on-site learning promotions. Colleges will have their own suggestion about what they can do to promote learning.
- 4.** There will be a need to repeat the questionnaires to see how new learners can be encouraged and to create discussion. The college may be able help draft a questionnaire and help to analyse the results.
- 5.** Developing progression routes is a part of the sustainability strategy. This can take place in the workplace or off-site depending on the numbers who want to be involved.
- 6.** The learning itself needs to help sustainability. Experience shows that it needs to be modules. Usually modules that last about 10 weeks are appropriate for our learners. More than this and can appear daunting to our members.

## Appendix 1 – A brief guide to how college finances work

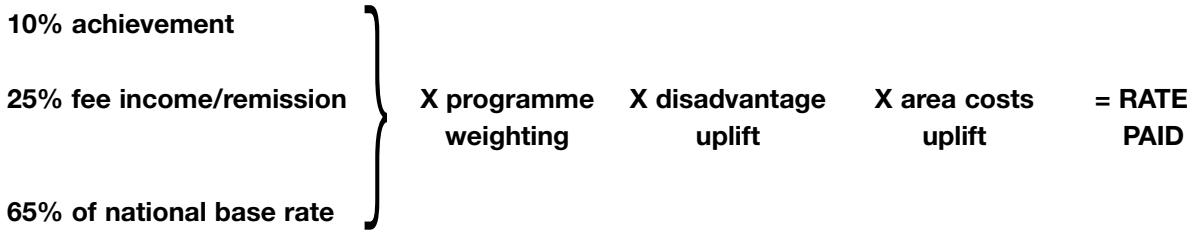
*The following information is based on the document “Funding Guidance for Further Education 2002/2003” final draft <sup>1</sup>, to which there are not expected to be any significant changes. The funding guidance will take effect from 1 August 2002.*

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC), a national government body that also has local offices, is the main source of funding for Further Education. The core of the funding arrangement is a national funding formula that uses standard rates/prices paid to colleges for providing learning that is approved by the Secretary of State. The formula has a number of elements.

- **A national base rate** reflecting the programme length and basic cost of providing the programme.
- **Fee income/remission.** There is an expectation that, where appropriate, learners (or their employers) will make a contribution to the costs of delivering their programme through the payment of tuition fees or a contribution towards the programme costs to the provider. Certain categories of learners are not expected to pay tuition fees and are therefore entitled to fee remission.
- **Programme weighting** reflecting the fact that some programmes of similar length are more costly to deliver than others, for example Information Technology. Money provided for basic skills attracts around 40% more funding than for the least expensive programmes to reflect smaller group delivery.
- **Achievement** – 10% of the weighted national base rate, uplifted where appropriate, is paid if the learner achieves.
- **Disadvantage** – an uplift applied to the national rate to support widening participation, that is, encouraging people to learn who have not previously been engaged in learning. This reflects the costs of this type of provision and recognises that some learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Disadvantage is determined by a learner’s home post (deprived areas based on wards), other aspects of their background for example, those whose statutory education has been interrupted, or their learning programme for example, basic skills.
- **Area costs** – a weighting factor reflecting the significantly higher costs of delivering provision in London and related areas.

<sup>1</sup>This document is available from the Learning and Skills Council website. The Web address for the document is as follows: [http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news\\_docs/DRAFT\\_Funding\\_Guidance.doc](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/DRAFT_Funding_Guidance.doc)

The following diagram illustrates the key elements of the formula:



It is important to understand some other features of the funding arrangements.

## Basic Skills

Where a learner's learning aim is a basic skills qualification, this automatically attracts full fee remission. In addition, the learner should not be charged for any other aspect relating to their basic skills learning aim. Employers are not expected to contribute to basic skills learning. *Basic skills education should therefore be free to the learner with no hidden costs passed on from providers.* In total, basic skills programmes will be funded at a level that is around 50% higher than comparable sized courses in other curriculum areas.

## Short Learning Aims

Short learning aims of three and six guided learning hours are available to basic skills learners who are over 19 years old. This is intended to enable providers to offer attractive learning opportunities that will engage learners and will enable progression onto more ambitious and longer learning aims.

Short learning aims of three Guided Learning Hours (GLH) in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are also available for learners aged 19 or over. These learning aims should be targeted at adults who may not previously have had access to provision or who are termed 'technologically disadvantaged'. It is expected that where a learner undertakes a three or six GLH learning aim as outlined above, this will be studied prior to progressing to a more substantial programme.

## Tuition Fees/Remission

Adult learners are expected to contribute to the costs of their learning by up to 25% where they can do so. A learner in receipt of an eligible income-based benefit on enrolment shall be eligible for fee remission for the whole of the academic year.

## Retention/Withdrawals

If a learner withdraws during a course, this results in loss of funding. Retention of learners is therefore very important as withdrawal of learners also results in loss of funding relating to achievement.

## Learner Support Funds

Funds are distributed to providers so that they may provide financial help to learners whose access to, or completion of, education might be inhibited by financial considerations, for example, childcare costs. Each provider must have a written policy explaining how these funds will be allocated.

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