

# Workplace Learning Committees



Usdaw Union Learning Reps (ULRs) have developed many Lifelong Learning initiatives with their employers and a joint Workplace Learning Committee has been vital to their success.

Learning Committees are a common feature in many companies from Shop Direct, Tesco and Sainsbury's to DHL, United Biscuits and Co-op Retail Logistics.

A Workplace Learning Committee is particularly important when setting up a Workplace Learning Centre. The Committee jointly runs the learning initiative and oversees the activity of the Learning Centre.

Learning Committees have different names – some are called Steering Groups others Lifelong Learning Groups. But whatever they are called, they play the same role. They:

- Develop ideas and policy on learning at the site.
- Co-ordinate, promote and organise activity around learning.
- Ensure that both the company and the ULRs play an equal role.

Many discuss workforce development issues, including both vocational and Skills for Life qualifications. In others, the focus has been more on personal development and organising learning in anything from British Sign Language to playing the guitar.

And Learning Committees are now making sure that learning is part of any negotiations around redundancy or restructuring. This means that when, despite Usdaw's best efforts, members either lose their jobs or find themselves facing redeployment, they have a chance to improve their skills and get the qualifications that will give them a better chance of adapting to their new role or finding a new job.

This leaflet will help explain what a Learning Committee does, who sits on them and how to set one up. It will help you decide if a Learning Committee is right for your workplace.

*“Enabling an environment where unions and managers work in partnership with each other is critical. Management 'buy in' is an essential ingredient and equally, it is important for managers to be kept informed of the progression of their team.”*



*“Joint Learning Committees played a key role putting our retraining and reskilling agreement into practice. It brought together management ULRs and providers, made sure that each site had a clear action plan and helped co-ordinate and communicate across the whole site. It’s particularly important to have a Joint Committee if staff are being redeployed, to help develop the skills they need for a new role.”*

**Jeff Broome**  
**Usdaw/Sata Boots**  
**UK Co-ordinator**

## Making Learning Committees work

### What do Learning Committees do?

The aim of a Learning Committee is to initiate, develop, promote, support and monitor Lifelong Learning activities at a site:

- ➔ They set up the learning initiative and oversee the way it develops.
- ➔ They identify what and how people want to learn.
- ➔ They promote learning and publicise courses.
- ➔ They monitor progress and get feedback from learners.
- ➔ They set up and manage funds to make learning affordable.
- ➔ They choose and manage relationships with colleges and other providers of learning.
- ➔ They communicate with other union and company committees.

Everyone needs to be clear on the role of the Learning Committee. So it is important the aims and ground rules for the committee are written down and agreed by everyone.

Sometimes these are called ‘terms of reference’. Sample terms of reference are available on Usdaw’s Lifelong Learning website: [www.usdaw.org.uk](http://www.usdaw.org.uk)

### Who sits on a Learning Committee?

Learning Committees take many forms and vary from site to site depending on the local company/union structures, the size of the site, the number of ULRs and the number of other unions on-site.

#### Larger sites

For larger sites or those where there is an on-site Learning Centre, good practice suggests that the Learning Committee needs to involve:

- ➔ Usdaw ULRs and other on-site union ULRs (up to a maximum of five).
- ➔ Management team representatives, including a member of the team senior enough to make decisions.
- ➔ A representative from the college or learning provider.
- ➔ An Usdaw Lifelong Learning Project Worker and where possible a TUC/unionlearn Project Worker (this brings in experience from other sites).
- ➔ The partner college or provider – to advise the group about the type of courses on offer and local funding issues.
- ➔ A senior union representative/convenor. This makes sure that the learning is linked with Usdaw’s organising strategy and any other campaigns. It also links ULRs into other union structures and ensures they are part of the Usdaw team.

## Making learning affordable

The cost of learning is one of the main reasons why Usdaw members don't get involved – Learning Committees can help make learning affordable by setting up a Joint Learning Fund:

- The Fund is used to subsidise learning that is not the employers direct responsibility (ie the Fund could not be used for job-related training).
- The Fund can receive money from a variety of sources – national and regional initiatives, revenue from providers or through Train to Gain and company contributions.
- The Fund is jointly managed by the Union Learning Reps and the company through the Learning Committee.

Usdaw policy is that any Learning Funds should be held in a separate account – either held by the employer or in a Unity Trust account. The account has both union and company signatories nominated by the Learning Committee. All expenditure and income should be recorded and reported back to the Learning Committee on a regular basis.

More information and sample rules for Joint Learning Funds are available on Usdaw's Lifelong Learning website: [www.usdaw.org.uk](http://www.usdaw.org.uk)



### Smaller sites

For smaller sites and for retail stores, the Learning Committee can take a variety of forms. These can be anything from a regional consultative structure to informal discussions between the reps/ULRs at the site, the site personnel manager/management and the local provider.

In retail sites, learning initiatives usually develop through Usdaw's Check Out Learning Campaign. These are often co-ordinated by the Reps Committee, the ULRs and/or Mobile ULRs and involve some input from Human Resources. It makes sense to continue the arrangement to monitor and develop the initiative once it is up and running.

Where arrangements are informal there will not be minutes of meetings. Make sure you keep a note of any discussions and confirm any decisions made in writing to the management representative.





## Top tips on Learning Committees

- Plan meeting dates in advance possibly for the year ahead and ensure meetings happen.
- Always have an agenda and make sure decisions and action points are recorded and circulated quickly.
- Elect a senior manager with 'decision making powers' as chair of the committee so her/his attendance is more likely.
- Invite 'specialists' along when particular items are on the agenda.
- Have a standard agenda item on new ideas and initiatives to sustain momentum.



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*The CRL depot at Thurrock has around 2000 staff with agency workers. We got the learning initiative up and running about two years ago and launched our Learning Centre in November 2008.*



*The Learning Committee oversees and manages the whole thing. It contains Usdaw and Unite ULRs and the management Engagement Champion. We also invite operational managers when we feel it's important. It lets us communicate where we are going and what's happening and builds their involvement and engagement.*

*We meet monthly and each meeting lasts a couple of hours. We send out an agenda well before the meeting and both ULRs and management can add items provided they give the proper notice. We have a Learning Fund so we have a financial report and discussion every quarter.*

*The Committee is very professional and that's important because learning is important to both the company and our members. We are doing well and have set up a RAW money centre and run courses in everything from NVQs to sign language. We had over 50 accreditations last year and will beat that figure this year.*

**Cathal Killeavy**  
Usdaw Learning Co-ordinator  
Co-op Retail Logistics, Thurrock



*Enabling an environment where unions and managers work in partnership with each other is critical.*

*Management 'buy in' is an essential ingredient when it comes to supporting both learners and ULRs. Equally, it is important for managers to be kept informed of the progression of their team.*

**Dionne Wilson**  
Engagement Champion  
Co-op Retail Logistics, Thurrock