INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE
UNION LEARNING REPRESENTATIVE CASE STUDIES

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The following case studies\(^1\) highlight the benefits to both individual and employer of union led learning in the workplace.

**Arriva, Leicester**

At the Leicester depot of bus company Arriva – one of the biggest in Britain with a 6,000-strong fleet across the country and a total of 17,000 staff on the payroll – they are determined to improve customer care and get on top of their staffing issues.

With employment in the sector forecast to grow by 6% over the next 7 years, the company knows it will be vital to continue attracting new staff who might otherwise be tempted into other sectors such as retail. “It’s a job-seekers’ market,” says Arriva Training Manager Sandra Barnett-Marrow. “A decent salary is not enough to attract and retain staff: organisations need to pay more interest to their staff and work with them as individuals.”

Through the forging of a management-union learning partnership, things have moved on from the old days when training at the company used to be almost exclusively focused on staff induction and driver instruction.

Transport union TGWU has opened 6 learning centres at depots across the region to help staff improve their Skills for Life and get to grips with computers. In addition, the company is encouraging everyone on the payroll to gain an NVQ in Customer Care. Over 260 learners have started NVQs, with a very high completion rate of over 70%, and many have gone on to take other company training, including supervisory and management courses.

Two bus drivers (part of the 23-strong team of union learning reps) have been appointed as NVQ learning project workers, trained in Adult Learner Support and as NVQ assessors. They help promote Arriva vacancies by meeting people referred from local Jobcentres to talk first-hand about the jobs on offer and explain the learning opportunities available to staff in the union learning centres.

Increasing awareness of Skills for Life issues has improved relations between managers and drivers. Where drivers who misread instructions or directions in the past would have been disciplined, they are now referred to the learning project workers to check if they need help with reading or writing.

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\(^1\) These case studies have been supplied by unionlearn, the Trades Union Congress’s skills and learning project from ‘Learning is the Business: How Workplace Learning Boosts Company Performance’.
Managers believe that the learning programme has also had a demonstrable effect on staff retention: in a sector characterised by intense competition and slim profit margins, it’s vital to keep turnover to a minimum.

“There has been a marked improvement in (staff) retention here, with turnover down from 14% to 2% in the last 12 months,” says the company’s national training officer Matt Chapman.

“It’s not been formally benchmarked, so we cannot isolate the union learning impact on this from other developments, but we think there is a strong link between the two.”

Arriva has supported the learning programme because they believe it will help them provide further opportunities to develop staff and become an employer of choice in the region.

“We’re looking to develop the learning agenda for all occupations – it’s all about us becoming a better employer through providing improved opportunities for staff to develop and progress,” says Sandra.

**Business Benefits**

**Reduced:**
- Sickness and absenteeism
- Staff turnover

**Improved:**
- Perception and employee satisfaction
- Quality of data reporting and/or analysis
- Take-up of company training and development
- Recruitment and induction processes
- Access to learning funds and resources

**Developed:**
- Learning culture to underpin High Performance Working Practices (HPWP)
- Learning to nationally recognised standards
Manchester City Council
When Manchester City Council created the new Environment and Operations Directorate, one-third of the 4,200 staff faced upheaval in their daily working lives as they were redeployed within the authority.

To support the staff through this process Manchester City Council launched a workplace learning project, Bargaining 4 Skills, supported by a range of unions, including Amicus, GMB, TGWU, UCATT, and Unison, as well as management in 2001. It is integral to the delivery of StepChange, an information, advice and guidance initiative introduced to support the redeployment programme.

StepChange offers staff a skills assessment and training needs analysis to help them explore their strengths and weaknesses, matches them to available opportunities elsewhere in the authority and supports them applying for posts. If needed, staff could then attend courses through Bargaining 4 Skills.

According to management reports, staff who attended Bargaining 4 Skills courses gained promotions they would never have gone for before, let alone achieved. Manual staff, who gained ICT skills, have been successfully redeployed from their old jobs (which no longer exist) into office-based work. “We have jointly promoted a culture of a shared ownership of personal development,” explains learning support manager George Korneki.

While Bargaining 4 Skills was originally launched to help manual staff gain Skills for Life, it has now broadened its appeal and helped office-based staff, including managers, access new opportunities for learning.

Involving managers during a process of change and upheaval has been crucial to delivering improved performance at the authority. “We have found that some managers with 20 years’ experience actually have 20 times one year’s experience, and the prospect of change is quite a challenge,” George says.

The project has contributed to a reduction in sickness rates in departments where large numbers of staff have been involved.

“In one department where a large number of staff have attended Bargaining 4 Skills courses, the sickness rate has come down to less than 2% this year. There is no way to attribute this to Bargaining 4 Skills, but we do think that involvement in learning helps staff to improve their morale, which in turn has an impact on sickness rates,” George says.
**Business Benefits**

**Reduced:**
- Sickness and absenteeism

**Improved:**
- Quality standards and corporate policy
- Internal communications
- Induction processes
- Access to external learning funding / resources

**Developed:**
- Learning culture to underpin High Performance Working Practices
- Learning to nationally recognised standards

**Enabled:**
- Redeployment of staff

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**Pirelli Tyres, Carlisle**

Tyre firm Pirelli has been able to introduce new technology and more complex manufacturing processes on the shop floor with the help of the Amicus-led workplace learning project at its Cumbria site.

When the results of an initial literacy and numeracy screening among the 1,000 staff revealed higher than expected numbers with Skills for Life needs, managers agreed with the union that the best approach would be to open a learning centre onsite. “Through the company-driven training needs analysis, we could never have picked up the Skills for Life/dyslexia needs that we have identified with the support of the ULP,” says training and development manager Martin Hughes.

Since the centre was opened with money from the Government’s Union Learning Fund, staff can take up to 30 hours’ work time or overtime to work towards a Level 2 literacy or numeracy qualification.

And if the appraisal process identifies skills gaps that are not directly job-related, or require additional support, line managers can now refer learners to the learning centre for short courses to improve, for example, report writing or IT skills.

Evaluation of the learning programme has shown that the site has been able to introduce higher value-added product lines requiring more complex processes because managers were more confident that staff could meet the manufacturing requirements of products that had more complex parts and quality standards.
The centre has also helped the company reach more staff. “The learning centre has bought in people who have not had any formal learning since school and who see company training as a ‘must do’,” says Martin. “This is highly beneficial for the individual and it is also great for the company that attitudes to learning are changing.”

The partnership approach has paid off for everyone, according to industrial director John Nixon. “Our success has been down to empowering people to run the centre, which runs on the goodwill of the unions and management being able to work together in the best interests of all.”

**Business Benefits**

**Reduced:**
- Sickness and absenteeism

**Improved:**
- Perception and employee satisfaction
- Quality of data reporting and/or analysis
- Quality standards and corporate policy
- Induction processes
- Access to external learning funding/resources

**Developed:**
- Learning culture to underpin High Performance Working Practices
- Learning to nationally recognised standards
# Impact of Union Learning Support

## Benefits Achieved by Case Study Businesses

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<td>Improved perception and employee satisfaction</td>
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<td>Improved quality systems</td>
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<td>Improved take-up of company training and development</td>
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