

BUSINESS SCHOOL



Migrant and Minority Learning Needs in the Communications Industry

Final Report

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Migrant and Minority Learning Needs in the Communications Industry

Summary

This report has been prepared for the Communication Workers Union (CWU) in line with the Work Packages as set out in the original University of Hertfordshire (UH) proposal of March 2009, and in particular to meet the outcome for Work Package 6.

The report draws upon data gained from interviews and case studies with CWU representatives holding various positions and at different levels across the country and with learners and non-learners in CWU workplaces. The data was collected between May and October 2009.

A key finding of the study is that migrant workers are not an easily identifiable group. They come from many countries, have different lengths of stay in the UK and when it comes to union learning within the CWU, are in practice, treated indistinguishably from second or third generation minority workers or indigenous workers. From discussions with learners and non-learners in CWU workplaces, it is apparent that there is a demand for skills development, however, these learning needs are generic to all workers and not specific to migrant or BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) workers. CWU Learning Centres taking part in this study are, on the whole, proactive in meeting the learning needs of all workers and generally promote a culture of equity and inclusiveness. This is in line with and reflects strongly embedded anti-racism practices promoted by the CWU.

A second finding of the study is the desire by workers taking part in CWU learning activities for certification bearing courses such as in IT skills and numeracy and literacy. While non-skills based activities were frequently offered, it was those activities which lead to certificates of achievement that were most popular, with many learners identifying portable skills as an important factor in their choice of course. A secondary reason for choice of courses was a desire to help children and grandchildren with their schoolwork.

Finally, it was apparent that the culture of union learning within CWU workplaces is extremely valuable for fostering social integration, of all workers in general and of migrant and minority ethnic workers more specifically. The main focus in the Learning Centres is on learning for learning's sake, the enhancement of transferable skills, and development of social and family links; with little evidence of conflict between learners. Defining migrant workers as a specific group is less important to ULRs (Union Learning Representatives) than including all workers in learning activities of some sort, regardless of ethnicity and origin. In this environment, meeting individuals' learning needs is the key principle, and there is a recognition that skill and qualification levels, and learning needs, cut across ethnicities; such that

workers from across the range of recent migrants to indigenous (white British) origins, can include highly educated people and those with basic skills needs including English language.

The following is a summary of recommendations from the report:

- ULRs be encouraged to continue to promote learning to the whole workforce.
- The provision of certificate-bearing courses remain a priority for ULRs.
- The CWU considers ways in which union learning can be provided without the necessity of drawing down government funds.
- Union learning project workers and ULRs should work with colleges to develop more flexible and sustainable ways of delivering certificate-bearing courses. This could further extend to the accreditation of learning centres as providers themselves. Further provision should be developed from independent providers and alternatives such as the WEA.
- The role of ULRs should be reviewed, to see what scope there is to broaden what ULRs do, to gain accreditation to deliver formal courses without college tutor input; and embed and tailor courses to suit learners; and to deliver informal learning.
- Explore the possibility of ULRs facilitating an introductory course (Gateway to Learning) using the range of free and accessible teaching materials which is available.
- Continue to develop learning arrangements across sites within Branches.
- Continue to encourage ULRs so as to broaden inclusion and access from diverse ethnicities and on the range of shifts.
- Development and training of ULRs needs to change in line with any change of role.

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Migrant and Minority Learning Needs in the Communications Industry

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared for the CWU in line with the Work Packages as set out in the original UH proposal of March 2009 and in particular, meets the outcomes for Work Package 6.

The CWU 'researchers brief' stated the main aims and objectives of the research project as being to 'map concentrations of, and areas of specific need for migrant and minority ethnic workers' and to 'match these to available resources (either within the CWU or the wider community) or to identify where we need to focus additional resources'; this was to be considered within the context of the union learning project. Specifically the project would:

- i. Research levels and concentrations of migrant workers in the communications industry;
- ii. Research migrant community groups and support networks;
- iii. Investigate the possibility of joint working with such groups;
- iv. Map areas of specific need for migrant worker support in the communications industry
- v. Produce a resource / info pack to support migrant workers in the communications industry

In order to meet these aims and objectives the report draws on data obtained from more than 30 telephone interviews with CWU union officers and workplace representatives and eight case studies as set out in Section 2 below. The data was collected between May and October 2009.

2. The research

The research was carried out in two stages:

Stage 1 – telephone interviews.

Initially the research team made contact by telephone with over 30 CWU union officers and workplace representatives around the country in order to ascertain the workplaces in which black minority ethnic (BME) and migrant workers were located and to gain an overview of union learning taking place. The vast majority of those interviewed were interested in the project, were forthcoming with their responses and willing to become involved in the second stage of the research as detailed below.

In most cases, respondents used their own interpretation of 'Black and Minority Ethnic' and 'migrant' workers. Some viewed BME and migrant

workers as those workers for whom English was not their first language and/or workers with little, or poor, spoken English. However, where a definition of 'migrant worker' was requested we suggested that these were workers who had not been born in the UK (i.e., who were not at least second generation citizens).

These interviews were based upon the interview schedule shown in Appendix 2.

Stage 2 – case studies.

This involved the team visiting eight branches which were selected on the basis of:

- a) the levels of migrant workers within the workplace;
- b) and/or the union learning which was taking place at the workplace;

and consisted of both Royal Mail (RM) and British Telecom (BT) workplaces. In two further cases visits were indefinitely postponed due to the ongoing industrial action across Royal Mail branches during this period.

During the visits the team spoke with local Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), and BME and migrant workers. In the case of the latter, we spoke with both learners and non-learners to ascertain their reasons for engaging or otherwise with union learning. These people were from diverse backgrounds with regards to ethnicity and formal education. Some of the interviewees were BME workers born in the UK while others were migrant workers whose residencies varied from over twenty years to under five years. What emerged from the research is that it is inappropriate to utilise the generic term 'migrant worker' as there appear to be no clear patterns of migrant workers across the organisation; there is, in fact, a 'super diversity' (a term used in the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning Thematic paper 3) of workers who not only originate from a number of different countries, but represent a multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures, religions and educational backgrounds; their legal status within the UK also varies.

We also spoke with 'indigenous' workers who were engaging in union learning. An example of questions asked is shown in Appendix 2. The data collected from these visits is analysed further in Section 3. In some cases the Union Learning Centres (ULCs) were visited while union learning was taking place and in one case, the ULC was visited on the day of its official opening when certificates of achievement were presented to learners. The team also visited a ULC which had been opened to the wider community, thus allowing local residents (some of whom were migrant workers) to engage in union learning activities and, for comparative purposes, a ULC in a workplace that had no BME or migrant workers.

The research team felt that all respondents were open and frank in giving their opinions of the union learning on offer and in their views of what they would like to see offered. This second part of the research has contributed greatly to our suggested materials for use when considering union learning for BME and migrant workers.

A list of branches / Union Learning Centres visited is attached in Appendix 3.

In addition, information and materials were collected from a wide range of sources outside the CWU and communications industry, as demonstrated in the directory of courses and materials attached in Appendix 4.

3. The findings

This section provides a summary of the research findings. For ease of reference this has been further sub-divided into a number of sub-sections: BME and migrant workers in the communications industry and their union learning needs; Union Learning Centres and management engagement with union learning; Union Learning Reps; union learning providers; and benefits of Union Learning.

3.1. BME and migrant workers in the communications industry: numbers and learning needs

It has not been possible to ascertain numbers of migrant workers in the industry represented by the CWU. Most respondents were unable to give figures of any kind with responses of 'none', 'a few', and 'quite a lot' being the norm. In some cases respondents were able to provide a rough estimate, for example 'about ten percent' and would then go on to give an approximate number of workers in the workplace.

One respondent who worked among a very diverse and multi-cultural workforce suggested a high level of integration when he stated that it would be difficult to know whether workers were migrants 'unless I go around asking them'. This point was made in a positive (and not an apathetic) manner.

3.1.1. Concentrations of BME and migrant workers

It is apparent from the findings that BME and migrant workers working within the communications industry are concentrated in certain areas of the country. In some areas respondents reported that there were no migrant workers at all and suggested that this was due to jobs being in short supply in those areas with the result that 'home' workers would be recruited first. This was the case reported by those interviewed in the North East Region and also to some extent the Eastern Region.

Some of the respondents in the North West Region (not Greater Manchester Amal) suggested that there was a lack of BME and migrant workers employed in the communications industry in their areas and that this was disproportionate to the local working population. Areas that identified a high proportion of BME and migrant workers were the Midlands and South East England. Branches in these regions were visited by the research team.

A common theme across workplaces is that both Royal Mail and British Telecom workforces have not been increasing staff numbers in recent years; at best the headcount is remaining static and in many places the number of posts is being reduced. Opportunities for new migrants to join are therefore limited.

3.1.2. BME and migrant workers and union learning: access issues

An important finding of the research was that there is no evidence of neglected groups of workers. The case studies demonstrated that generally there was equal access to all workers regardless of their background and whether or not they were union members. As would probably be expected, the findings demonstrate a mixture of union learning activities aimed at BME and migrant workers and a variance in the level of up-take of these activities when offered.

Although the case studies provided several good examples of union learning practices being provided for BME and migrant workers, these were usually in workplaces with high percentages of such workers and were therefore not specifically aimed at these workers but rather at the workplace community as a whole. In effect, the learning needs of migrant workers (e.g. improved literacy) were consistent with those of the workforce as a whole.

Likewise, many of the issues and problems concerning access to union learning are common to all workers, not just BME and migrant. They are issues of location, employer and time.

All the CWU learning undertaken in the study is provided from within a fixed learning centre and/or training rooms within one workplace in the area. There is an access problem for workers who work more independently, in smaller satellite workplaces or on the road. It is noted, however, that one branch has developed an 'outreach' learning centre in an attempt to deliver training to smaller offices in its area.

The learning centre premises are provided by the employer, in the case of this study either RM or BT. Although there are some learning centres in non-employer sites, the majority of union learning activity takes place in

employer sites. In some cases, equipment (computers) is also provided by the employer; in other cases this is shared or provided through funds accessed by the CWU.

Overall, there are varying levels of access to learning centres. There are many examples of workplaces where the employer has agreed to extend access to CWU learning to all other workers on the site, in cleaning, catering and security work, supplied through employment agencies. However, there are also examples of ULCs where access to employer-based learning centres is in many cases restricted to those on employment contracts direct with the employer. Thus workers employed by either RM or BT were more likely to have access to union learning than those from employment agencies (for example cleaning staff). This relates to all workers in this position and not primarily to BME and migrant workers although many of these workers are either migrant workers or from BME backgrounds. There are very few examples non-employees (ie. family members; and workers in other communication employers) gaining permission to attend learning centres.

One example of a learning centre which had brought in workers from other industries and the wider community, now no longer does so. The ULR reported that there had been a large take-up of the learning on offer. The ULC was no longer open to the community due partly to financial reasons but also because the RM operation was soon to be re-located and this latter issue had put a greater demand on resources as RM employees were seeking to undertake skills enhancing courses. As the ULR stated 'people who have worked here a long time are having to apply for new jobs and realise that their maths and literacy are not up to standard and they are turning to us for help'.

When other ULRs were asked about opening their ULC to the wider community a number responded positively as they felt that this would be a useful means of extending learning opportunities to families and also of engendering greater social cohesion within the local community. Some had considered doing this while others pointed to their worksite's security procedures as being a major obstacle. One ULR on a greenfield site who, due to the remote location of the building, was experiencing difficulties attracting learners. S/he was considering the possibility of running non-skill based learning (i.e. digital photography or ballroom dancing lessons) at a community centre in the local town centre.

The agreements for learning centres are between the RM/BT employer and the CWU union only. The study found no examples of multi-union agreements and centres. Most learning centres provided learning to non-union members as well as union members. The employer appears happy

to support an initiative that benefits the whole of the workforce providing their service. In some centres CWU provides learning to relatively large numbers of migrant employment agency workers, although there appears to be a reluctance to take-up union membership in large numbers. There does appear, however, to be more success with union recruitment among longer-serving agency workers and those who move into permanent employment with the organisation.

The study found that the provision of courses for workers on late and/or night shifts was a problem and this disproportionately affected BME and migrant workers. Union organisation generally appears a much stronger activity during the daytime, and this is especially the case with ULRs and learning project workers.

In a number of cases, the RM/BT employers' restrictions on out-of-hours access and security arrangements also hinder access to learning centres outside of daytime provision.

Some centres have no agreement regarding workers' time off for learning. Others have a 'match-time' arrangement, typically of employer and employee each providing one hour per week. Such two hour blocks are at the start or end of shifts. The 'match-time' initiative was, perhaps not surprisingly, a popular idea among learners and non-learners at other centres. Non-learners at centres where there was no 'match-time' believed that similar agreements would encourage them to engage with union learning activities (although this was not the case on one Greenfield site where the location was the over-arching factor prohibiting uptake – see below).

Learning is almost entirely class-based and is almost entirely provided by Further Education (FE) colleges who supply tutors and materials to the CWU learning centres. There are some examples of colleges being prepared to run classes into the evening, but most of their provision is daytime. Where the Workers' Education Association (WEA) is the provider, there appears to be greater flexibility in terms of minimum class sizes, times of delivery and tailoring of courses. The study also found one example of an independent private training tutor who is more flexible and also a college tutor who was willing to extend her time to overlap the various finishing times of the learners. Greater flexibility is welcomed and praised by the respective ULRs who were keen to emphasise that these processes were outside the normal tutor procedures. [see also 3.4 below]

The vast majority of CWU learning is through computers (PCs and laptops). This offers flexibility for learners to drop-in to learning centres and work individually, although it is also constraining. A few centres are

experimenting with taking laptops out into smaller workplaces and satellite locations to run classes outside the main learning centre and at alternative times. There are examples of local colleges which are keen to help this arrangement. However, there are issues of security, quality of the classroom environment, and physical transport of laptops to be overcome, as well as ownership of laptops (union learning-funded laptops may be used for this; RM/BT employer-funded laptops are not able to leave the workplace).

A number of workplaces visited are examples of where work is being increasingly concentrated in large Greenfield sites. In such sites, the union has high membership, and there are sufficient numbers of learners to run a variety of courses. However, many learners tell of lengthy travel to work commutes. For some, time is a barrier as they are balancing shift work (in some cases 12-hour shifts) with family commitments and lengthy periods of travelling to and from the workplace. Learners suggested that time constraint was a significant barrier for some of their colleagues. There may be a gender aspect here, as female workers were noticeably not keen to be at the workplace outside a normal working day.

The study found, in a number of locations, an unwillingness to spend longer than necessary at the workplace. Some workers said they are keen to learn, but prefer to attend forms of learning within their home communities; these issues apply to workers of all ethnicities and origins. This is particularly an issue in 'greenfield' workplaces located away from community residential locations. Exceptions are the large number of displaced BT field engineers for whom the CWU is providing redeployment training – there are no time/access problems for this group, although the group contains a relatively small proportion of BME and virtually no migrant workers.

In a number of areas, arrangements are developing beyond workplace to Branch level, with increasing emphasis on the role of learning centres in large workplaces acting as hubs for learning in satellite locations such as Delivery Offices.

Overall, the research found a rather fragmented provision of learning across branches. Although there were a few issues that relate more to BME and migrant workers, most issues relate to all workers.

3.1.3. Profile of BME and migrant workers, their learning needs and barriers to engaging with union learning

The BME and migrant learners interviewed were from diverse backgrounds. They came from a variety of different cultures (including African, Asian and Eastern European), were of a range of ages and

included men and women. They have different levels of education and qualifications, ranging from no previous qualification to degree level.

The BME and migrant workers undertaking union learning were all committed to learning and saw union learning as a way of enhancing their portable skills and improving their opportunities for employment outside their current workplaces. Unequivocally, workers from *all* backgrounds were seeking certification of their learning achievements and most were looking to progress beyond some of the basic courses.

Nearly all of the workers cited IT courses as their main interest for union learning. This was not exclusive to BME and migrant workers as most of those spoken with, regardless of background, were looking for IT training.

BME and migrant workers identified communication skills (both oral and written) as an important learning need. Some suggested that current courses are limited in their use, and that where courses with practical outcomes for communication skills (such as writing a business letter, CV, etc) are embedded as examples, these are seen as more useful. Although men and women engaged in union learning, men were more likely to join IT classes than literacy classes while women were willing to undertake both.

Workers across the board also suggested that they would like to engage in a wider range of courses including: Spanish; French; CV writing; counselling; yoga. Language courses were particularly popular, but cost was a deterrent to uptake.

In a fairly recently established ULC, the learners suggested that there was a stigma attached to joining union learning classes and that their colleagues teased them for taking part. It was their belief that colleagues found it difficult to admit that they were lacking in any basic skills as this might be viewed as a weakness by management and/or other colleagues. This particular ULC was serving a hugely diverse workforce and the point was made by a UK born BME worker (who 'messed around in school') and is, therefore, likely to be representative of many workers, regardless of race or ethnicity. Nonetheless, migrant workers may perceive themselves to be in a more vulnerable position, as was suggested by the respondents in some of the initial telephone interviews.

Those interviewed identified cost as a significant factor in undertaking courses. Again this was not exclusive to BME and migrant workers. Courses that are free to the learner are very important in union learning provision. Many of the workers suggested that they would not have sufficient resources to fund themselves on courses. Some of the more peripheral workers (e.g. cleaning staff) are particularly affected with

regards to low pay; for example, one migrant worker who was a tradesman in his home country described the difficulties he was facing supporting his wife and two children in a one-bedroom flat. This man was changing from one daytime shift to two shifts ('lates' and 'nights') as these unsociable hours carried a small monetary premium. Neither money nor time was available for union learning although he would have liked to engage with the learning activities on offer.

One of the telephone respondents identified problems related to enrolling migrant workers who do not hold British passports on courses provided by external institutions as funding is only available to British citizens.

Many migrant workers have been in the UK for some time. The study spoke to some who have been here for between two and four years (although all had held jobs with other employers prior to this one), and others who have been here for ten to thirty years. There was little indication of a need for training and advice for migrants who are newly arrived in the UK.

3.1.4. Current union learning provision for BME and migrant workers

Those taking part in the telephone interviews identified ESOL as a previous union learning initiative, however, as funding has now been withdrawn for ESOL they have been faced with finding more 'innovative' ways of providing this service to workers, particularly through basic skills/Skills for Life. This finding was supported by the case study research.

The study also found that prior to employment RM workers have to undergo a written test, thus the English of these workers was at a level at which they were less likely to be in need of ESOL. Likewise, engineers working for BT did not require such basic English training (see the point in 3.1.3. about the lack of recently arrived migrant workers). However, some of the ULRs working on sites where workforce recruitment for manual, non-skilled jobs was more difficult were rather sceptical about the level of spoken and written English of some workers, suggesting that the recruitment 'tests' were far less rigorous in these workplaces and that basic skills requirements needed to be addressed. Indeed at one such site the research team spoke with three migrant workers (all non-learners) who struggled with their spoken English.

One important service offered by a number of ULRs that was particularly relevant to migrant workers is the arranging of the translation of overseas certificates into English and mapping these to UK qualifications.

Although it was identified in the preliminary report that some workplaces had introduced IT skills courses with literacy and numeracy embedded into

them, the case study research found that this had been met with mixed reactions by the learners. In some cases, the learners felt that the courses focussed far more on literacy than on IT and also that the literacy was at a very basic level. In more than one of the ULCs the learners suggested that there were learners of mixed ability with regards to literacy and numeracy levels. Other ULCs have systems in place to assess the levels and ability of learners prior to enrolling them on courses.

Many 'off-the-shelf' courses run by accredited providers enable the learner to gain a transferable qualification – although many are also immediately relevant to the employer; in fact some of these are funded by 'Train 2 Gain' vocational funding.

Non-accredited learning, and more informal and local initiatives, often have the advantage of being more tailored to learners' needs and enable flexibility in provision. In these situations ULCs often produce their own certificates in the absence of formal awarding bodies.

For a directory of courses and materials, see Appendix 4.

3.2. Union Learning Centres and management engagement with union learning

A variety of learning centres were visited. All centres were equipped with computers. Some ULCs had purchased computers out of union learning funds, while computers in others had been supplied by the course providers (i.e., local colleges), and in other places by the employer (or a combination of different machines 'owned' by different parties).

As described in 3.1.2., all rooms were on employers' premises and so 'provided' by the employer. Most learning centres are away from the main operations and thoroughfare areas. However, in one learning centre courses were held in an 'internet café' space provided by the local management. Due to its availability to all workers, this caused some problems with sole access for union learning courses. There was a further problem relating to security of equipment which in itself created an additional problem regarding the visibility of learners. For security purposes, management would not allow blinds on the windows of the room which was in direct access to the staff canteen. Learners were in full view of their colleagues and felt somewhat exposed. They believed that this visibility made other workers reluctant to join in the union learning activities.

Actual use and visible ownership varies from centre to centre. A number are largely unidentifiable as CWU ventures, blend in with and share other room facilities with employers' training and meeting rooms. Indeed, in publicity, some ULCs appear to be 'RM' or 'BT' learning centres, with no mention of the union. Others are more clearly CWU-run and this extends to displays of union

literature, posters and information on wider union campaign and organising issues. In a quest for both identity and autonomy, most ULCs have been given 'names' (e.g. 'The Junction' Learning Centre). However, all are dependent on the goodwill of local management, which can change with the appointment of a new site manager. All are guided by committees or steering groups of union and management representatives, but with varying degrees of management interest and union freedom.

Management-union relationships were cited by a number of ULRs as having an impact upon management's engagement with union learning and ULCs. Although one ULR went as far as to suggest that the ULR role needs to be detached from IR issues in order for it to be successful, many of the other interviewees showed an awareness of the danger of falling in line with the employer's agenda and were keen to reinforce the links between learning and industrial relations.

Clearly, relationships between ULRs and management varied across workplaces. In some, managers promoted (and actively engaged in) union learning, while in others they were just short of obstructive. One ULR reported that a manager had suggested that it was irrelevant whether a worker had good spoken English as long as they were able to key-in data. Conversely there are also cases where, when the union learning proves to be particularly successful, management are reluctant to grant full recognition for this to the ULRs and seek to take credit for themselves.

In the case of the ULC visited during its official opening, RM management had initially been semi-hostile towards the ULC, but it would seem that the enthusiasm and engagement of the learners (in this case almost completely being white women) was encouraging them to take a more co-operative approach towards learning. However, in this instance RM appeared to be trying to take 'ownership' of an activity that was deemed successful by placing restrictions on the display of Union Learning promotional materials. It is important to ensure that the CWU get full credit for initiating and organising union learning through a presence in the ULC and any publicity materials that are produced if the notion of peer group support is to have any credence.

3.3. Union Learning Reps

It was clear from interviews that the ULRs are dedicated, hard working and have a strong belief in and commitment to union learning. In some cases the ULR held a number of union roles, including: local workplace rep; health and safety rep; women's officer. Most ULRs put in many hours outside their working day in order to ensure that workers were engaging with union learning and that courses were running effectively. Long hours were cited by

some ULRs as being the reason for a lack of union members putting themselves forward for ULR roles. Pro-active ULRs are clearly an advantage when promoting union learning. At one case study site two different sectors of the workforce had access to the same ULC, however, only one set of workers were engaging in union learning. A number of ULRs said that it was important to have a clear union learning structure within CWU branches and that lead co-ordinator / lead ULR roles were important.

Time-off for union learning duties varied dramatically across the ULCs. Some managers provided ULRs with full-time release from workplace duties while any release at all was an issue for others. The Lead ULR in one branch only obtained ULR facility time after progressing his case with an Employment Tribunal.

All of the ULRs appreciated the input of the Regional Project Workers and many were concerned about losing the support of these people when funding expires. The contribution of regional learning committees was also valued.

Despite the work of the Regional Project Workers and their regional learning committees, there appears to be little sharing of experiences between branches, with many representatives hungry for information about what other places are doing and expressing an opinion that they must each be 're-inventing the wheel'. The study found no substantial sharing of information and resources between RM and BT branches (no doubt partly explained by employers' constraints), and none with other unions in the area.

Links between ULRs and IR reps were sometimes strained. Some ULRs felt that they were not supported by the local workplace representative and on occasion found them 'dismissive' of the ULR role. As already stated above, some ULRs felt that their role should be divorced from IR involvement, however, contrary to this, others used the union learning agenda to recruit CWU members.

Most of the ULRs advertised their courses widely but found that 'word of mouth' was the best form of recruitment. Satisfied learners were encouraging work colleagues to partake in union learning activities.

There were varied experiences of publicity for union learning by ULRs. Some have very prominent and colourful display boards. Learners interviewed identified notice boards as being an important source of information for forthcoming courses. Some use the languages of migrant workers to advertise – others do not. Some learners felt that it would be useful to advertise courses in different languages while others strongly disagreed saying that all workers should be able to speak English. Generally, there is very little use of websites.

Currently the ULR role appears to consist of encouraging workers to sign up for courses, by walking the floor and being proactive talking to people. Some centres ran 'learning events' which encouraged workers to complete forms expressing their learning interests and then tried to match requests with courses. There is some informal guidance given about which course might be suitable. Many also then allocate learners to courses, taking account of minimum and maximum numbers of learners required by the college provider to make a course viable, ensuring the learning centre room is booked, and liaising with the college tutor. Some ULRs, particularly 'lead' ULRs, also have the role of brokering agreements with the college, and managing the portfolio of courses on offer to workers.

A relatively new role for some ULRs, is to be trained and qualified in giving Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), through one-to-one sessions with potential learners. If accredited, this can be a source of income based on an IAG fee per learner. A number of centres have obtained or are working towards gaining the Matrix standard for IAG accreditation, enabling them to operate without dependence on other providers.

Some ULRs are qualified (C&G) Adult Learning Support (level 2). Some of the ULRs had themselves undertaken training in order to provide union learning courses while others were thinking of doing this.

With a number of notable exceptions, the ULRs in this study comprised more male than female ULRs, majority are white British, generally older rather than younger workers, and mainly work daytime. This broadly reflects the composition of the total number of trained CWU ULRs. The statistics for the whole ULR population show that just over a quarter of ULRs are women, compared to a fifth of the whole CWU membership. It is recognised that data on age was not collected in this study. Of the total CWU ULRs 71 per cent are in the 25-49 age group - it is possible that this study included more experienced ULRs as its contacts than the ULR population as a whole. The desirability of increasing the ethnic diversity of ULRs, and their distribution over shifts, appears to be a key area for the union.

3.4. Union learning providers

The ULRs all used local colleges as providers of courses. The colleges enrol workers and are then able to draw down funding from Government sources via the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Feedback by both ULRs and learners on course provision varied from 'excellent' to 'adequate'. A number of ULRs are pro-active in choosing their local providers and make it clear that they will use the provider that best suits the needs of their learners.

Most ULRs stated that colleges required a minimum number of learners per course (in some places eight, but many examples operated on a minimum of

twelve) and that this could be a problem, particularly for late/night shifts. Some ULRs identified that commercial targets of colleges meant they were very output focussed, putting attendance and test results before the needs of the learners. It was also suggested that not all tutors had an understanding of the concept of union learning.

One ULR provided anecdotal evidence that another ULC had coerced the local college into paying a higher rate to tutors who were delivering union learning at unsociable hours.

The study found reported variations of delivery standards, processes and procedures college – by – college, and between different parts of the country. Delivery appears to be dependent on the budget and target regime of each particular FE college, and at the level of the Learning and Skills Council; this also varies according to the time of year (stage in the budget cycle). For example, some colleges fund free IT courses, others are not able to.

In some centres, tutors were willing to stagger their teaching times to suit the learners (for example, in one ULC a tutor started classes to accommodate workers whose shift finished at 15.30, but continued for those who finished at 17.30). See notes on the greater flexibility provided by independent providers and the WEA in 3.1.2 above.

3.5. Benefits of union learning

3.5.1. Learners

Nearly all the learners spoken with identified the importance of being able to undertake their learning at the workplace. This was for a number of reasons: firstly, there was the issue of time; secondly, learners believed that they were learning in a more relaxed environment than at a college; and finally, and closely related to the second point, a number of learners said they would not feel confident enough to attend a college. On gaining an IT certificate one woman stated that it was the first learning she had undertaken for over forty years. A lack of confidence was a typical characteristic of the learners, although a number of those who had completed courses felt that they would now be more willing / able to take further courses at colleges. More than one learner showed an interest in undertaking further and/or higher education and asked questions of the interview team as to how they could go about this.

A number of learners commented on their new-found confidence in that they were more able / willing to deal with issues external to the workplace. Some stated that a major benefit of learning for them was their ability to help family (mainly children and grandchildren) with homework, particularly where IT was involved. All were proud to have embarked on their learning

journey and were particularly pleased to have obtained certificate levels in their chosen studies.

Although qualifications are not linked to pay and progression with their current employer, certification was important to nearly all of the learners who saw this as evidence of acquiring transferable skills 'particularly in the current recession' as commented by more than one learner. A number were hopeful that it may help them in a future career outside the industry.

3.5.2. CWU

In all the workplaces visited the ULC raised the profile of the CWU to a greater or lesser extent. Many of the ULCs had CWU literature on show and all union learning notice boards were clearly identifiable as originating from the CWU. The workers spoken with during the course of the case studies were generally aware of the CWUs role in the ULCs and union learning projects. Nonetheless, as discussed above in some workplaces management made efforts to promote the ULC as a management initiative and ULRs complied with this to varying degrees; for some it was a 'take it or leave it' scenario as management ultimately have the power to rescind the resources provided. There was, however, evidence of ULRs allowing the union identity to emerge once initial management interest had waned and they had been left to their own devices. A number of ULRs had made comments long the lines of 'as long as we don't make any trouble they let us get on with things the way we want to do it'.

In some ULCs both ULRs and Branch Officers were able to take the opportunity to discuss a wider range of issues (employment rights, trade union campaigns) with workers/members. As discussed above, however, it appears that this is not widespread practice in the study with a number of learning centres being used solely for learning, with an IR/organising agenda located separately.

It would appear that union learning has some impact on recruiting members from newer work groups and migrant workers, namely outsourced agency work in postal sorting and in support functions who are engaged in union learning. However, this is most effective where recruitment is made an explicit part of the learning activities, for example through being given a place in Adult Learners Day activities, or where the Branch Secretary actively recruits in the learning environment. The study found little evidence of a link between union learning and membership where this has not been given direct emphasis in the learning activities.

A feature of the ULCs visited (and those interviewed by telephone), were workplaces with high union density among established workers of all origins already. It could therefore be argued that the high membership

levels are at least maintained through the presence of union learning, although there is little direct evidence of this.

There is some evidence that the union learning promotes activism in the workplace. Some of the ULRs were new to the concept of active trade union participation while others have already held other branch posts. A few (women) are attracted to the role because of its non-confrontational approach where it is kept separate from IR/bargaining.

Overall, it would appear important to build more structured links between workplace industrial relations issues, organising and learning.

3.5.3. Managers

A clear advantage to management is being able to draw upon sources of funding to up-skill their workforce. Management gain workplace skills through union learning, either in a general set of skills or through more job-specific NVQs, although it can equally be argued that these provide learners with portable skills and qualifications for career progression. There is not a clear line between learning that benefits employer and employee, in many cases the benefits overlap. ULRs are keen to point out to learners that job-specific training should be paid for out of management training budgets; and that an individual can access government funding for their first level 2 (or below) qualification only once.

As was clearly evident from the ULC visited when certificates of achievement were being presented, union learning has a motivational effect upon the workers. The management present on this occasion were happy to take a share in the credit of the ULC and promised the workforce that they would support further learning initiatives.

Union learning events also promote cohesion among the workforce. A number of learners commented that they had not known each other before they joined the courses but were now 'friends'. This is particularly relevant where there is a diverse workforce – there is a strong feeling that barriers are broken down through the learning experience.

3.5.4. Wider community

The benefits of learning for the wider community are similar to those stated in the previous sections. It was apparent that learners were taking their knowledge home with them to share with their family and friends. Alongside this, learning with colleagues from other ethnic backgrounds enhanced the understanding and tolerance of differences and therefore greater social cohesion not only in the workplace but also in the wider community.

Various examples of unions working with migrant communities were considered during the course of this study. These included the work of the GMB in Thetford, Norfolk, providing workplace rights advice and wider social activities as well as learning activities with a (largely Polish) Central and Eastern community. The work of a multi-union learning centre based in the community, and that of two CWU Branches in particular, were also acknowledged by the researchers.

In the main, the project found evidence of specific ethnic groups providing their own support mechanisms in the communities and this is undoubtedly something that CWU reps and project workers should continue to tap into. However, the overall finding of 'superdiversity' means that it is not valid to prescribe particular community groups to access. Rather, these will vary according to location and make-up of population. In addition, the culture of social inclusivity the research team found during the research means that workers as learners, from a variety of ethnicities and origins, offer learning support to each other in the workplace.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The research project set out to consider the levels and concentrations of migrant workers in the communications industry and to investigate how these workers are supported and aided by the CWU, particularly through the union learning agenda. The research team was also charged with mapping areas of specific need for migrant and BME workers and to produce materials which would support the learning needs of these workers.

A key finding of the study is that migrant workers are not an easily identifiable group. Most of the workplaces visited had a diverse, multicultural workforce (a 'superdiversity'), covering a vast number of nationalities and ethnicities. The research established that workers within the communications industry come from many countries, have different lengths of stay in the UK and have different levels of education. In some cases, workers with little formal education were working alongside others with degrees, the latter being from non-UK institutions and which were not readily accepted by UK employers.

A very positive outcome of the research is the extent to which the CWU engages with union learning for all and how for this purpose migrant workers are largely treated indistinguishably from second or third generation minority workers or indigenous workers. From discussions with learners and non-learners in CWU workplaces, it is apparent that there is a demand for skills development, however, these learning needs are generic to all workers and not specific to migrant or BME workers. CWU Learning Centres taking part in this study are, on the whole, proactive in meeting the learning needs of all workers and generally promote a culture of equity and inclusiveness.

- The study recommends that ULRs be encouraged to continue to promote learning to the whole workforce.

With regards to promoting social inclusion and equity within the workplace there is an identifiable culture of good practice across ULCs. There is a prominence of anti-racist literature throughout CWU Learning Centres and the language used by ULRs and other CWU representatives is inclusive.

The study also identified a keen desire by learners of all backgrounds for certification bearing courses such as IT skills and numeracy and literacy courses. While non-skills based activities were frequently offered, it was those activities which lead to certificates of achievement that were most popular. Many learners identified portable skills as an important factor in their choice of course, particularly in the current economic climate and with BT and RM restructuring and job threats. A secondary reason for choice of courses was a desire to help children and grandchildren with their schoolwork.

- The study recommends that the provision of certificate-bearing courses remain a priority for ULRs

It is clear from the research that cost is a major factor in the provision of workplace-based learning and particularly certificate-bearing courses; in order to run courses ULRs and colleges rely heavily on Government funding. This is under threat and a possible change in administration in 2010 may place even more of a question mark over the Union Learning Fund. Many colleges also require a minimum number of students in order to make a course viable. In many cases, there is a problem with access to courses for those working un-social hours.

- The study recommends that:
 - The CWU considers ways in which union learning can be provided without the necessity of drawing down government funds.
 - Union learning project workers and ULRs should work with colleges to develop more flexible and sustainable ways of delivering certificate-bearing courses. This could further extend to accreditation of learning centres as providers themselves. Further provision should be developed from independent providers and alternatives such as the WEA.
 - The role of ULRs should be reviewed, to see what scope there is to broaden what ULRs do, to gain accreditation to deliver formal courses without college tutor input; and embed and tailor courses to suit learners; and to deliver informal learning;
 - The CWU should explore the possibility of ULRs facilitating an introductory course (Gateway to Learning) using the range of free and accessible teaching materials which is available (see

Appendix 4 and Teaching Materials. (This would not include ESOL, literacy and numeracy where specialist teaching is required).

The CWU Union Learning Reps and Project Workers fulfil a vital role in promoting and facilitating union learning in the workplace and in learning centres. In a number of areas, arrangements ULRs and other Branch Officers are developing beyond workplace to Branch level, with increasing emphasis on the role of learning centres in large workplaces acting as hubs for learning in satellite locations such as Delivery Offices. In addition, where industrial relations issues and organising are explicitly featuring in the environment of learning activities, there is opportunity to further recruit and organise among migrant and minority workers. Not only may this provide a source of recruitment for the union, but it is very important to broaden the ethnic diversity of ULRs and to broaden access to ULRs over different shift patterns, in order for union learning to reach many workers in need of learning support.

- The study recommends that:
 - The CWU continues to develop learning arrangements across sites within Branches.
 - The CWU continues to encourage ULRs so as to broaden inclusion and access from diverse ethnicities and on the range of shifts.
 - Development and training of ULRs needs to change in line with any change of role.

Finally, it was apparent that the culture of union learning within CWU workplaces is extremely valuable for fostering social integration, of all workers in general and of migrant and minority ethnic workers more specifically. The main focus in the Learning Centres is on learning for learning's sake, the enhancement of transferable skills, and development of social and family links; with little evidence of conflict between learners. Defining migrant workers as a specific group is less important to ULRs than including all workers in learning activities of some sort, regardless of ethnicity and origin. In this environment, meeting individuals' learning needs is the key principle, and there is a recognition that skill and qualification levels, and learning needs, cut across ethnicities; such that workers from across the range of recent migrants to indigenous (white British) origins, can include highly educated people and those with basic skills needs including English language. A priority for the CWU might be to defend the excellent practices of social cohesion that are at risk of being undermined by recession and industry restructuring; and to promote this contribution to policy more widely.

Appendix 1

Branches / Union Learning Centres visited

Area	Role
CWU National	Senior Field Organiser Learning and Organising Project Worker
London: Hatfield distribution Centre Watford No.1 Edmonton (BT) Colindale (BT) Mount Pleasant -ditto-	Early Shift Union Rep Branch Chair and Communications Officer ULR ULR / Administrator, Workplace Union Learning Centres London Regional Project Worker Lead ULR
Eastern	Eastern Regional Project Worker
North West Region: Merseyside Amal Greater Manchester Amal Cheshire No.1 Preston	N.W. Regional Secretary Lead ULR & N.W. Regional Education Secretary Lead ULR, Gt Manchester Lead ULR N.W. Regional Project Worker
North East North East Coastal Amal Pudsey, West Yorkshire - 02	North East Regional Secretary Branch Secretary Lead ULR
Midlands: Midlands No 7 -ditto- Magna Park, BT Nat Distribution Centre East Midlands Airport Birmingham District Amal Northamptonshire Amal Nat. Distribution Centre, Crick, Northants -ditto-	Midlands Regional Project Worker Lead ULR ULR Secretary; ULR; H&S officer ULR; workplace rep; H&S rep Branch Secretary Branch Secretary Workplace Union Representative Lead ULR
South East: Heathrow Worldwide Distribution Centre Bournemouth and Dorset Amal -ditto- Canterbury and Medway / Maidstone	South East Regional Project Worker ULR Lead ULR Branch Secretary Lead ULR
South West Bristol & District Amal	Branch Secretary

APPENDIX 2

Interview schedule case study branches

INTRODUCTION

We are conducting a research on behalf of the CWU nationally on migrant workers and union learning

We have been tasked to do two things;

- (i) We are trying to map migrant (and BME) workers in branches and workplaces
- (ii) We are trying to establish what the needs are for union learning among migrant workers in order to produce materials.

1. Name of branch:
2. Branch officer(s) interviewed:
3. What geographical area does your branch cover?
4. What workplaces does your branch include?

	Number
Post offices
Post offices delivery
Mail centres
Other

5. Are there any workplaces where there are particularly large numbers of 1) migrant workers 2) BME workers?
6. How are you defining 'migrant workers'?
7. Are there any sections (across workplaces) where migrant workers are concentrated (i.e cleaning, support etc)?

- a. Why?
 - b. Does this raise any gender issues?
8. Where are the migrant workers from?
- Poland
 Other A8 countries
 Outside the EU (where?)
9. To what extent are migrant workers on particular shifts?
- a. Why?
 - b. If so, does this present problems?
10. Have there been any issues about contacting, recruiting or organising migrant workers? (prompt: advantages/disadvantages of recruiting migrant workers?)
- a. How have any issues been addressed
11. Are there any issues regarding agency workers and migrant workers?
12. Could you outline any union learning activities that the branch has been involve any specific union learning initiatives aimed at migrant or BME workers?
13. How does the union learning take place? (where, how long established)
14. What co-operation is there with other a) branches b)national union c) other unions d) local organisations e) local education providers?
15. How are the learning needs of migrant workers assessed?
- a. What are the learning needs of migrant workers?
 - b. How do you decide which courses to put migrant workers on?
 - c. How are the courses delivered?
 - i. (days, events? computer-based/participative methods?)

- d. Who delivers them?
- e. Who designs the courses or are they off-the-shelf?
- f. Are the courses accredited/certificated?

16. Which courses have been more or less popular?

17. Is this across the board or are there issues of take up regarding UK/migrant workers, gender and age?

18. How does course/learning delivery differ according to

- a. Occupation
- b. Shift
- c. Country of origin
- d. Prior qualification

19. Have you identified any learning needs for migrant workers that are not currently going on?

20. To what extent are the courses and learning provided driven by the availability of: a. Funding

- b. Need
- c. Demand

21. Are union learning courses for migrant workers delivered to:

- a. Union members only
- b. All workers
- c. Wider groups

22. How do you evaluate training/learning to migrant workers?

- a. What seems to be working well, less well.
- b. Are there any problems
 - i. Enrolling
 - ii. Funding
 - iii. Teaching/supporting

c. And how are they overcome?

23. Are there materials that you have used that you would recommend/ not recommend (particularly regarding literacy and ESOL)

a. Can we take examples?

24. Are employers involved with your union learning?

a. In what way?

b. Are they obstructive or helpful?

(prompt: match time?)

Follow-up further contact

APPENDIX 3

Interview schedule migrant workers

INTRODUCTION

We are conducting a research on behalf of the CWU nationally on migrant workers and union learning

We have been tasked to do two things;

- (iii) We are trying to map migrant (and BME) workers in branches and workplaces
- (iv) We are trying to establish what the needs are for union learning among migrant workers in order to produce materials.

25. Location of meeting

26. Migrant workers interviewed

- a. Country origin
 - i. Poland
 - ii. Other A8 countries
 - iii. Outside the EU (where?)
- b. Time in UK
- c. Occupation
- d. Shift
- e. Gender
- f. Age (estimate?)
- g. Union member
- h. Location/workplace
- i. Directly employed or employed by an agency

27. Home country background

- a. Qualifications (subject/level)
- b. Previous occupation

28. Where is 'home' for you?

- a. How often do you go home – and how often do you stay there?
- b. Have you looked for work at home?

29. How did you end up in this workplace?

30. Are there any jobs and shifts where migrant workers are concentrated (i.e cleaning, support etc)?
- Why?
 - Does this raise any gender issues?
31. Learning needs in the UK
- Work-related
 - Wider
32. How are your learning needs assessed?
33. What training courses or other learning sessions have you been on?
34. Who organised these courses?
- Where were they?
35. How did your employer assess your learning/training needs? What training did your employer provide for you?
- Did you find it enjoyable? useful?
36. What do you think is the role of the trade union (CWU)?
(prompt again, whether union member, and why joined)
37. Have you been on any training courses or other learning sessions organised by the trade union?
- What courses
 - What materials
 - What support
38. From the trade union courses, what works well and less well? What is useful and less useful?

39. Are there materials that you have used that you would recommend/ not recommend (particularly regarding literacy and ESOL)
40. How could current trade union courses be improved?
41. What else could the trade union do to help with any learning needs you have? (What are your other learning needs?)
42. Is it useful to you to have training courses that are accredited?
43. Who else (outside work and the trade union) helps you with your learning needs?
44. Is there anyone else, any other organisations, groups, you think we should talk to?