

UNION MODERNISATION FUND

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**THE GENERAL FEDERATION OF TRADE
UNIONS – SUPPORTING GROWTH
AND STABILITY OF SMALL SPECIALIST
TRADE UNIONS**

The General Federation of Trade Unions – supporting growth and stability of small specialist trade unions

Introduction

The General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) supports small specialist trade unions and professional associations in the majority of employment sectors. Its primary focus for support is around education and training, delivered through a registered charitable trust. The GFTU's educational service has a formidable reputation amongst affiliates for delivering a strong, positive educational core and bespoke educational programme, working with educational partners Ruskin and Northern Colleges.

Why this project?

The union's executive committee had identified the need for rigorous development of the educational provision, so that services would increase the organisational effectiveness of affiliates and support the short and long-term needs of affiliate activists and members. The EC also proposed to work with affiliates to identify capacity building activity. The Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) provided an opportunity to pursue these goals, looking specifically at:

- improving full-time officers' and lay representatives' understanding of modern business practices, so that unions could work more constructively with employers as partners to improve business performance – particularly welcome were initiatives that would

Background

- The GFTU is the UK's federal body for small specialist trade unions.
- Affiliates range from the Association of Educational Psychologists to the Professional Footballers Association.
- There are currently 32 affiliates, with 320,000 members.
- 3000 accredited learning opportunities were provided by them in 2006-7 alone.

equip officers and reps for their roles in implementing the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations;

- improving the ability of unions to respond to the increasing diversity of the labour market, and to supply services geared to the needs of a diverse membership; and
- developing the professional competence of union officials.

The union decided to focus their UMF project on providing:

- a tailor-made range of training courses to support the management and organisational needs of trade union officers and staff, to include time management, organising and managing teams, project management, understanding and managing stress; there was a particular emphasis on good practice in recruiting and organising within an ethnically diverse workforce;

- a range of specialist courses for senior stewards and trade union officers around understanding, implementing and monitoring the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations;
- training and organisational support for members, officers and others to structure ongoing training and organisational needs analyses to ensure that their union is well placed to monitor, review and plan for strategic training and other organisational needs.

Objectives

The objectives set for the project were to:

- increase the managerial and operational effectiveness of union officers and staff;
- enable officers to reposition themselves around employer relations through a greater awareness of the Information and Consultation Directive;
- enable officers to better recruit and organise, and so build organisation and effectiveness;
- enable affiliates to better review and plan a response to external and sectoral changes and develop long-term training and development strategies for officers, staff and trade union activists – for example, being better placed to be more proactive around monitoring new legislation and recognising what new demands this places up on it.

Methodology and outcomes

Learning needs analysis

The project began with a wide-scale learning needs analysis. Past GFTU students were asked to identify what future training and development opportunities the GFTU would need to provide in order for them to respond effectively to changing business and sector

practice (such as contracting out and privatisation); use technology better to organise and communicate with their members; and to ensure they have the full range of organising, communication and representation skills that they need to do their job. Forms were either completed and returned in a prepaid envelope or filled in online.

Developing courses

The analysis of results influenced the subsequent development and accreditation of a range of new officer courses to form the basis of a seminar programme. Courses included advanced negotiating behaviour, project management, diversity awareness and change management.

Twenty-six courses were run in seminar workshop programmes, with the emphasis on daytime events. Although initial recruitment was patchy (rectified by better marketing, using the biennial conference to raise awareness and the general secretaries of affiliates promoting events via their websites and journals), recruitment onto courses overall was marginally higher than the GFTU's recruitment across its mainstream core educational programme.

Project management

More than 500 activists and officers have attended bespoke, accredited training, exceeding the union's initial target of 400. This increase was achieved through strong project management, including:

- Following the learning needs analysis, activists and officers who gave their contact details were contacted directly, with information and courses suitable to them.
- The project manager made sure that there was a high profile programme of recruitment across all areas of related activity.

- Strategic links were drawn between courses, so that students could see a clear, qualitative path of development opportunities.

Strong project management throughout also ensured that elements were delivered on time and was a key driver of success, as Ian Manborde, Trade Union Research and Education Services, emphasises:

'It was crucial that project milestones were agreed at the outset and reached on time, since missing a deadline would have severely impacted upon course delivery. Regular monitoring and evaluation also helped to keep the project on track.'

Evaluation

Courses were highly regarded by participants, as Ian reports:

'Overall feedback from students was consistently positive, both through evaluation forms and in structured interviews during seminars. Students underlined the overwhelming need for such training and valued accreditation, highlighting a longer-term need for a single benchmark qualification for trade union officers. One-day seminars were particularly valued by officers with heavy workloads.'

Evaluation showed that students felt that the programme offered skills development opportunities which were transferable to their own jobs; provided courses that were either difficult to enrol on in the workplace or unavailable altogether; and had the added bonus of taking place in accessible venues, with travel expenses paid.

Transformational potential

Students identified the value of education aimed at examining the critically important issues of time management and handling conflict, and said that this training, although highly relevant to paid officials and senior activists, was not always provided by their

own union. Ian Manborde feels that the project has real potential for transformation across trade unions:

'This provision is filling a real need gap in workplace and trade union education and training offers. Regardless of historical reluctance to enrol on training, students are seeing this education offer almost as an opportunity, as one student put it, "too good to miss". The education offered is seen as lively, stimulating and dynamic – this is reason enough for GFTU to want to sustain key educational themes, such as project management, that were developed for this project. Indeed, we have agreed to embed examples of this training into future core programmes, so that we constantly offer the very best support to our affiliates. We also recommend that affiliates consider seeking our expertise (as one affiliate has already done) to develop an accredited officer's programme. The GFTU could play a role here by promoting the value of specific learning around leadership and management skills through, for example, the use of a notable awarding body such as the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).'

Lessons learned

Disseminating information

- The GFTU's Education Officers' Forum, a quarterly event attended by an educational representative from each affiliate, proved an ideal medium to gather data about exact numbers of activists and officers from each affiliate benefiting from training; and a more sophisticated mechanism through which to disseminate publicity than through the union's own channels and websites.
- Each quarter, the GFTU's Head of Educational Services reports to the union's Executive Committee, on which sits the general secretary of each affiliate. This meant that the project could be scrutinised more closely and tailored to distinct groups of activists and officers.

Input from officers

- A slight weakness in the project was that, to impact directly on the organisational effectiveness of each affiliate, it needed significant input from either paid officials or senior managers within affiliates. The GFTU's EC, therefore, needs to play a prominent role in enabling officers to attend courses.

Training needs analysis

- Although the initial training needs analysis to identify core themes needed specific funding, it was, nevertheless, seen as invaluable and the recommendation is to undertake such an exercise every two to three years. Continuing provision will therefore be based on discrete ongoing analysis, both of need and of trends and currents within trade union activity and organisational change.

Conclusion

This very successful project not only met its objectives but has also produced considerable benefits in terms of sustainability. Says Ian:

'As a result of the highly positive feedback, the GFTU has ensured that core training incorporating key skills to develop overall individual effectiveness was embedded in its core educational programme. A GFTU affiliate, the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) asked the GFTU, as a direct result of feedback from its activists engaged in this project, to develop customised training to support the skills and development of their activists.'

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