

# Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Findings No. 5

## Delivering Work Based Learning

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"Improving demand for high quality in-work training" is identified as a key objective for the Enterprise Networks in *A Smart, Successful Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2001) where the emphasis is firmly on human capital investment as a key engine for the development of a competitive Scotland. This study focuses on the role of work based learning in this process. It presents the findings of a survey of Scottish employers and employees, undertaken in 2000/2001 with the aims of researching the extent, nature and perceived value of work based learning (WBL) in Scotland.

## Main findings

- 72% of employers have increased the volume of work based learning over recent years.
- 78% of employees surveyed had participated in work based learning over the previous 12 months. However, there were marked variations by employer size and occupational group:
  - 38% of employees in organisations with less than 25 employees claimed to have received no training in the last 12 months, compared with 15% in organisations with over 250 employees.
  - Employers reported providing training to around three quarters of managerial, professional and technical staff, compared with just over half of plant and machine operatives and unskilled workers.
- IIP recognised or accredited employers tended to provide more WBL opportunities, particularly in the case of staff below managerial, professional and technical levels.
- Employers see the benefits of training as helping to retain or improve their position in the marketplace. The most important benefits are: improved quality of service or product; making the company more competitive; raising employee competences; keeping up with technological developments; and increasing the flexibility of employees and increasing productivity.
- Pressures on staff time and resources are the most frequently raised barriers by employers to the provision of work based learning.
- Employer reluctance to give time off the job was the main constraint on undertaking more work based learning cited by employees. 12% of employees had a request for training turned down in the last 12 months.
- Overall, 40% of employees engaged in work based learning over the previous 12 months reported that this was accredited, the proportion varying significantly from 51% of craft and related workers to only 8% of the unskilled.

## The Incidence Of WBL

The study defined work based learning as “any training that relates directly to the requirements of the jobs on offer in your organisation”. Employers predict a significant increase in the demand for both organisation specific and generic skills in the next 2 years. Employers have responded to these changing skill needs by offering more training, although this varies by employer size, from 63% of employers with less than 25 employees to 77% of employers with 250+ employees.

In addition to variations by occupational group and IIP status, mentioned above, there were also substantial variations by sector and variations by gender. 60% of employees in the energy and manufacturing industries received training in the last 12 months, compared with 88% in public administration. 75% of female employees compared with 65% of male employees claimed they had received training from their employer in the last 12 months. 47% of employers claim to support employees to undertake training not directly related to their job, but only 4% of employees corroborated this. 79% of employees involved in WBL reported that this had been instigated by their employer.

## Value of WBL

The main benefit of WBL to employers is seen to be retaining or improving competitiveness. Employees see the benefits as: helping them to produce better quality work, increasing self-confidence, and keeping up with technological change.

Employers considered WBL that provides employer specific skills to be more effective than industry wide

training in increasing productivity and improving quality. There was also a strong preference for on-the-job training, particularly among smaller employers. Off the job training was seen as the most valuable method of gaining the necessary skills to move to another employer by 43% of employees.

## Accreditation of WBL

Employers perceived accredited training as more valuable than non-accredited training in helping to:

- create industry wide skills (55% preferred accredited)
- develop core skills (53%)
- improve company image in the marketplace (51%)
- create employer specific skills (47%)
- improve staff morale (45%)
- increase staff loyalty to the company (42%).

However, non-accredited training was viewed as more valuable in raising employee productivity (44%) and developing more flexible employees (40%).

87% of employees considered that accreditation provides benefits additional to training with no qualification. They particularly valued the “currency” it provides in the wider labour market.

## Constraints on WBL

The most significant barrier to employers increasing provision of WBL is losing staff time off the job, raised by 40% of respondents. The cost of course fees and the need to pay for staff cover are major issues for

1 in 5, while limited money set aside for training was cited by 14%. The lack of external funding and of information on available training opportunities were not considered key constraints by employers, although when asked what would encourage them to provide additional WBL 54% of employers mentioned financial assistance. Lack of information was a greater barrier to individual employees, and was mentioned by 19%. The main reason employers gave for not providing accredited training was a lack of accreditation relevant to their organisation.

Where employees were offered training and did not take it up, the most important reasons were that they did not consider it relevant to their job, or that too much training/study was required outside of working hours.

## Increasing WBL

Employers and employees were asked for their views on role of government in increasing WBL. 60% of employers and 29% of employees felt an increase in training grants and subsidies would result in an increase. 14% of employers and 16% of employees wanted additional/better information on training. 11% of employers felt that the government should actively sell the benefits of training to employers to encourage them to participate, and 9% thought a push for more firm specific, job relevant training would engage more employers. 11% of employers felt there should be grants and incentives available to the employee directly.

## Recommendations & Issues

The various elements of the research process suggested the following broad approaches to promoting and supporting work based learning:

- reducing **costs** to employers
- increasing **awareness** of the benefits of work based learning
- encouraging employees to **demand** learning opportunities
- creating more **appropriate support** and provision around work based learning
- developing more **effective processes** around accreditation.

A range of issues still need to be tackled. These include:

- simplifying the institutional map
- delivering appropriate work based learning, both in terms of its contribution to the needs of the employer and its fit to the learning and career development needs of the employee
- facilitating demand and supply links
- developing the training supply chain
- prioritising sectors for support
- prioritising occupational areas for support
- supporting smaller businesses more effectively – e.g. by developing a brokerage service to assist SMEs
- creating more demanding stakeholders (customers and employees)
- making better use of the public resources currently supporting work based learning.

## About delivering work based learning

The study was undertaken by the Training and Employment Research Unit at Glasgow University on behalf of the Scottish Executive Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department. A number of different survey methods were employed:

- 270 employers, principally SMEs were interviewed by telephone across the case study areas with approximately 30 in the rural labour markets, 40 in the town labour markets and 60 in the city labour markets.
- 500 employees of organisations, again principally SMEs, were interviewed face to face or by telephone across the case study areas in the same ratio as the employer survey.
- 30 in-depth interviews were carried out with employers, and 20 sets of focus group discussions were held with employees to provide richer qualitative information.

The surveys were carried out between October 2000 and April 2001.

Additionally a number of face to face and telephone interviews were conducted with individuals drawn from National Training Organisations (NTOs), local Enterprise companies and other relevant organisations. These interviews sought feedback on the key constraints on the take-up of work based learning, and on what could be done to involve more employers and a wider range of their employees.

The study was based on six localities chosen to provide a good spread of areas both in terms of geography and by labour market type. They were: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Kircaldy, Inverness, Cumnock and Doon Valley, and Borders.

Further information about Delivering Work Based Learning and the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department Research Programme can be viewed on the internet at [www.scotland.gov.uk/who/ellld/res.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/who/ellld/res.asp). Alternatively you can contact Zoë Ferguson, Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department, Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G3 8LG (Tel: 0141 242 0261, email: [zoe.ferguson@scotland.gov.uk](mailto:zoe.ferguson@scotland.gov.uk))

This Research Findings and the full report can be viewed on the internet at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/> or further copies may be obtained from:

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